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THE  
LION IN THE PATH.



THE  
LION IN THE PATH

An Historical Romance.

BY

THE AUTHORS OF "ABEL DRAKE'S WIFE"  
AND "GIDEON'S ROCK."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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## CONTENTS.

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CHAP.	PAGE
I.—THE PRICE OF A SECRET . . . . .	1
II.—A JACOBITE ARMOURY . . . . .	9
III.—THE EARL'S TOWN HOUSE . . . . .	22
IV.—AWAY TO THE KING . . . . .	30
V.—A BOLD CONSPIRATOR . . . . .	38
VI.—“PAINTING THE LILY” . . . . .	78
VII.—THE BLACK SATURDAY . . . . .	86
VIII.—A LAST APPEAL . . . . .	94
IX.—FRIGHTENED LONDON . . . . .	115
X.—THE WEAVER'S GARRET . . . . .	119
XI.—FALL MALL . . . . .	128
XII.—THE PASSING BELL . . . . .	138
XIII.—HOW FRIGHTENED LONDON REVENGES ITSELF . . . . .	147
XIV.—THE MERCER THANKS GOD HE IS LOYAL . . . . .	158
XV.—THE TWO WITNESSES . . . . .	176
XVI.—THE “EMMA JANE” . . . . .	181
XVII.—DANGER AHEAD . . . . .	193

CHAP.	PAGE
XVIII.—ROBBING THE SCAFFOLD . . . . .	201
XIX.—SIRE, HAVE I FULFILLED MY PROMISE? . . .	208
XX.—OUTSIDE . . . . .	214
XXI.—INSIDE . . . . .	219
XXII.—THE TOWER . . . . .	238
XXIII.—THE SUPPLIANT . . . . .	248
XXIV.—THE NINE DAYS' WONDER . . . . .	260
XXV.—“PARDON, SIRE, PARDON!” . . . . .	271
XXVI.—THE LAST SUMMONS . . . . .	281

HE

# LION IN THE PATH.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE PRICE OF A SECRET.

WHILE the preparations were going on for what was now seen clearly enough to mean assassination—while the new men were brought in one by one, examined, and sworn—while arms were being vigorously tested, so that every piece might be relied on as if that one piece was to consummate the business by being the chosen weapon to kill the king—while horses were being looked for distinguished for strength, speed, and training—and while, lastly, all sorts of arrangements were being discussed as to what was to follow afterwards—while all this was going on, and the English king and his government were daily treading, as it were, unconsciously, upon a

powder-mine, Clarence Harvey and Noel met one night under the feeble ray of a street lantern, and recognised each other.

Clarence Harvey passed rapidly on, hoping to remain unknown ; but in passing, a heavy hand was pressed on his shoulder, and the words were heard from the other—

“ Well met ! ”

“ Good night, Noel. I cannot speak to you just now ; my master waits for me.”

“ Your master ! Come, I like that ! Let me again remind you, my pretty mistress, you have another master.”

“ And let me remind you, Noel, that I never mean to acknowledge that master.”

“ No ? ”

“ No.”

“ Art sure ? ”

“ I am sure. But, for goodness’ sake, Noel, remember what we are, and what we are doing. Is the cause to suffer for our contemptible jangles ? ”

“ The cause—the cause ! How pretty the words sound out of those rosy and ripe lips ! No wonder those who cling to the one cling to the other. But then, you know, those who are forbidden the [one may also desert the other.”

“ Very well. Desert as much as you like. Go and tell of us if you like.”

"Oh, yes! I understand! You and the chief, I dare say, are quite one. But doesn't my beautiful spy-wife expect that some day her double face will be apt to get damaged in one, at least, of its aspects? Which is it, now? True to the Jacobites, and betraying King William? Or true to King William, and betraying the Jacobites?"

"You are rude, Noel, and I shall not stop to be insulted."

"Will you stop for something else?"

"What do you mean?"

"Will you stop if I tell you a secret?"

"A secret, Noel?"

"Ay; one that will shake my pretty one's nerves, though she can stand a good deal by this time."

"Does it concern me?"

"That depends. It concerns your master, as you call him, who is living just now in a fool's paradise."

"Ay? How?"

"That's my secret. Will you buy it?"

"At what price?"

"Come back to me, forget the past; go again with me to church, and I promise this time to be more careful of the wings of my lovely bird."

"You jest!"

"Do I? It's an ill time for jesting, when one's eye seems to look through a strange veil of mist,

and when one finds on touching it the finger is wet with blood."

"Blood! Mercy on me, how you frighten me, Noel! Whose blood?"

"The price—the price!"

"Do you mean that you have discovered something—something that threatens General Langton and his schemes?"

"Ay, by threatening somebody or something that the world would indeed stare at to see struck."

"Oh, Noel,—dear, dear Noel, do tell me! Come, tell me, and I will give you a kiss."

"Well, I'll take the kiss by way of handsel!"

Noel kissed her, and held her just where the light of the lamp fell most strongly on her face, as if in great secret trouble with himself.

"You beautiful angel, or beautiful devil—I can never quite satisfy myself which; for the angel, even while I look, is always shading off into the devil, and the devil brightening upwards into the angel—what am I about to do? Make myself infamous, eh?"

"Or glorious," suggested Maria, certain now she was on the eve of some most important discovery.

"Do you know—can you at all imagine what it is for a man who has been devoted to his party heart and soul, who has for many years had no thought or hope in life that did not connect itself with the cause, who has once stabbed a comrade only on suspicion

of treachery—can you even for an instant, understand what honour, fidelity, devotion, self-sacrifice mean ; and then, knowing that all these have been mine, can you ask me to sweep all these things to the winds, to betray my comrades, and live the life henceforward of a despised, abhorred renegade ? ’ He seized her suddenly and fiercely by the hand, and grasped her wrist so hard that she shrieked with the pain. “Woman, can you ask me to do these things ?”

“Y—Yes,” murmured Maria, the thought of George giving her new courage.

“Then pay the price ! Take me, make much of me ! Black as I shall seem in my own eyes—spotted as I shall seem in the eyes of every loyal, manly, and generous spirit, you shall love me, ay, by heaven you shall, or——”

“Or what ?” fearfully asked Maria below her breath.

“Or I send you away as empty and as ignorant as you came ; to wait for that which, when it comes, will make you wish you had not merely accepted my price, but had conjured me to accept the bargain—had gone down on your knees to entreat me to accept it, even in the public streets and in the mire ! Speak, then, mistress. I will waste no more words. I am about to go this way. If you also go the same way, you shall know before we separate all



that I know. Or go that way, if you like. I shall not follow you ; but there will be following you dread, unseen ministers of fate, who will reproach you to your dying day for the calamities, as you and your friends will esteem them, that your conduct to-night alone will bring about. Now choose—that way or this ? ”

“ Is the secret so—so perilous ? Is it—is it really —— ”

“ Worth such an extortionate price as the taking me ? Well, I do think it is even worth that ! ” Noel said.

“ Dear Noel, do not speak so bitterly. I have never been insensible to your merits —— ”

“ So I perceived when you fled from me. Come, come, mistress, I am not afraid we shall get on well enough, if you strike the bargain.”

“ And what is it you demand from me—I mean when and how ? You would not disgrace us both by showing the secret motive that actuates you ? ”

“ No,” said Noel, after a gloomy pause, and as if that thought had not before struck him.

“ If you do change sides,” continued Maria, seeing her advantage, “ and take with you to the new one, supposing that to be the effect, the claims arising from a most timely and invaluable service, would it be wise for us and our future standing to say it is not for the

sake of the good you do it, but for the sake of a woman who is worthless enough, heaven knows?"

"What then?" asked Noel, eyeing her closely and suspiciously.

"Why, that our marriage must be kept most religiously secret."

"As the other was! Thank you, mistress, I decline."

"Very well, then the alternative——" and Maria could not conceal a certain joyous animation as she spoke, though she tried to do so—"is to wait till the first hurry of the event is over."

"How long?"

"Will you give me a month from to-day?"

"Will you play me any new trick at the end of the month?"

Maria went to him, put her arms round him, and led him away in the direction he had indicated as the one he meant to pursue, saying, as they went—

"Dear Noel, if I do try you again, I shouldn't like you to begin by doubting; so if you like, you may take another kiss, in token of all I could say."

Noel listened, and his soul dissolved within him at the tender sweetness of the words. All past disappointments, past resolves, past threats of vengeance

were forgotten. He kissed her in transport ; and then, on finding a secure place of shelter where no one could possibly overhear, Noel told to Maria the whole history of the underplot, which was about to be worked to such terrible conclusions.

## CHAPTER II.

### A JACOBITE ARMOURY.

NOEL found Maria quite prepared to acknowledge that he had fulfilled his share in their compact,—that no revelation could be well more important. And seeing how agitated she was—how changed from her ordinarily superficial butterfly manner—he allowed her to go away without any questions as to the use she proposed to make of the discovery.

In his own mind he had not the remotest doubt as to her behaviour. She would, of course, go to her patron, the Chief of the Secret Service; through him communicate with the government; exact a magnificent reward, and then ——

“Well, then,” said Noel to himself, “let me look well to the explosion, or there’s an end to my love-making.” So he resolved to withdraw to a place of security well-known to Maria, and there wait; expecting hourly to be summoned to testify as to all he knew.”

How should he deal with the government when summoned? Should he, too, make his knowledge a matter of bargain and sale, and so bring to the sub-

sequent marriage his share of the money necessary for future comfort.

No, he would do nothing of the kind; his conscience acquitted him of any motive so base as betraying his comrades for the sake of filthy lucre. He had been tempted, like other and far greater men, by a woman to forget what was due to honour; but, at least, he would stop there and go no farther down the hideous slope leading to eternal infamy. He promptly, therefore, resolved that he would act a manly part; and not even make terms for his own safety. He would simply say he had been loyal, as they might well know, to his old sovereign; and he now, moved by remorse as he thought over the proposed murder, proffered this act of devotion in proof he meant to be loyal to the new one.

A day passed, and he grew uncomfortable at finding his heroism was not yet put to the test.

That night he had to meet his comrades. It was dreadfully unpleasant. He had hoped to be spared the misery, the shame, and the danger of another sight of them. He went, made a great effort to assume light-heartedness, heard that things were "going swimmingly," to use Scum Goodman's phrase, and he returned home without seeing any special cause for alarm. Clearly, no one, as yet, suspected him.

But when a second day and a third passed over

and were equally blanks, he grew nervous, frightened, and desperate. What could Maria be doing?

He sought for her in all her known haunts, but without effect; while meanwhile the movements for the murder were sweeping on at a constantly accelerating pace; far faster, indeed, than the movements for the insurrection. At times he repented of what he had done, and madly resolved, if he could but get hold of Maria, to threaten her at the sword's point into silence; give her back her promise of marriage, and fulfil his first bargain—that of fidelity to his comrades.

But Maria was no more to be found for this purpose than for the other. What, then, was she doing?

Noel, in his contempt for Maria's want of principle, had underrated her power to substitute other and decidedly respectable motives, leading her after all to the same end. She never for an instant dreamed of betraying the murder-plot of the Jacobites to her own ostensible employers for her own interest. Her first thought, on the contrary, was that perhaps General Langton might be willing to shut his eyes while the catastrophe was worked out, so that he might then do just what the assassins intended he should; that is, take advantage of the horrible confusion to strike the blow, at once and for ever, that should put King James in the vacant place.

It may seem strange that she should show such devotion to General Langton. But, in truth, she now felt for him all the clan-feeling of her parent towards his family. Here was, at last, one man that she might at once respect, love, work for, and be near (while she concealed her sex); and she felt happier for the new position, more like what some day she hoped to be in all things.

But even these influences were subordinate to, and sprang from her love for George, which hourly increased in intensity, and affected her in all sorts of ways.

The instant Noel had revealed to her the news she started off to inform General Langton; but found he had suddenly changed his lodgings, no doubt under some new danger, and had, as usual, left no trace of his movements.

To and fro did the young creature pace the London streets, night and day incessantly, vainly seeking the man upon whom just now she felt so much depended, the king's life to begin with, when—suddenly she received a summons from the police chief, that changed the tenor of her thoughts.

The scene shifts to Worcestershire. It is sunset, and the last rays of the February sun are making the glass in the windows of Mendlip House shine with intolerable radiance.

Externally, the picturesque old pile, full of gable ends, high-pitched roofs, slender pinnaced towers and buttresses, quaint chimneys, and beautiful bays and oriels, looked strangely quiet and lonely, even under all that fierce interchange of glances with the sun; for not a face was to be seen at any one of the innumerable windows; the courtyard gates were closed; and the grass was growing within them and without.

But the sun sets, the windows fade into obscurity, the birds sing their farewell hymns, and twilight darkens around, and still the old house rests as if conscious of nothing but its own gradual decay.

Another hour or two past, and it is dark. Then begins to be perceivable a gradual change in Mendlip. Spectral-looking horsemen sweep across the park to and from the house, as if by means of some unnoticed gate at the back.

Presently a light cart appears in the distance. It is driven rapidly up, and it disappears round that same corner which sheltered the horsemen from observation.

That cart has but just reached its destination, when lo! another appears in the same track, and yet another and another, till there is quite a stream of them swarming into the domestic regions of Mendlip Hall.

Let us, in thought, glide across the lawn, pass that corner, and try to discover what it all means.



A gate just big enough to admit the carts is held open by a man, and as each passes in, the gate is instantly closed.

As we see it open for an instant, we catch a glimpse of torches, of men unloading the carts and hurrying away with the contents, which they take through low doors into cellars below the old house.

It is arms they carry ; swords, guns, ammunition, flags, drums, and other musical instruments. Yes, it is Mars who is here assembling, under his own red banner, all the paraphernalia of war.

But even while they thus bustle, working at a rate of speed that implies their consciousness that not an hour can be relied on as their own, while the full carts roll in and the empty ones roll out, there is suddenly heard a musket-shot.

In an instant the whole scene is transformed. The torches are extinguished ; the half unladen cart is taken outside, just as it is, and driven away into the thickest part of the woods ; the other laden carts that are already near at hand follow the example, while those that are further off start into the near high road, to become all of a sudden quiet, respectable carts, going early to the distant market, so as to get there by daybreak ; the men who had been removing the arms are no longer anywhere to be seen, and the doors through which they carried them are closed, and Mendlip looks as peaceable as ever.

Then, as a faint gleam of moonlight steals forth, the stately doors in the front open, and the owner of Mendlip, book in hand, with his wife on his arm, and a child running by their side, issue forth, and pace up and down as if dreamily enjoying the pleasant frosty air, and the growing light of the moon.

Horses' hoofs are now heard on the gravel, and presently a troop of men, led by the sheriff in person—a big, bulky, imperious man—come noisily up, and the owner of Mendlip advances to meet them.

The sheriff, seeing the lady, takes off his hat just for a moment, then puts it on again, and speaks, in a stern, exacting voice—

“So, Mr. Babington, at the old tricks again, eh? Harbouring rebels, eh?”

“Have you received information to that effect, sir?” asked Mr. Babington, in a tone of great self-restraint.

“Don't chop logic with me, Mr. Babington; I know you of old. Do you choose to accompany me in my search or not?”

“I will go with you, and show you whatever you please to ask: only spare me comments till your search is over.”

While the bulk of the party remained outside, and kept watch on the outlets, the sheriff and half-a-dozen armed followers dismounted, ascended the stately flight of stone steps, and went in.

The sheriff had clearly found on the present occasion what he had not been able to obtain before, a vague clue to the mysteries of Mendlip House. To the surprise and secret alarm of the owner, he began to discover one hiding-place after another never before known to any but the Babington family, and of them known only to the heads.

Some of these secret places showed for what purpose they had originally been devised. There were, still in them, as the sheriff observed, "books, masoning stuff, and Popish trumpery." Many a hunted Jesuit had here found secure concealment when all other places had become too hot to hold him.

Mr. Babington only smiled at each fresh display of the curiosities of his home; but there was a nervous twitching of his lip, and an uneasy fitfulness in the wandering glances of his eye, that showed he was ill at ease.

Among the followers of the sheriff was one, a youngish fellow who took great interest in these romantic quests, and distinguished himself by the zeal with which he urged on the discovery of what he called the rebel nest-holes. He had been sent by the chief from London, as having himself had some slight knowledge of the interior on a former occasion.

His zeal led him to push on in advance. The sheriff was standing in wonder and admiration before the latest of the discoveries—"the tenth," as he

exclaimed, with a sort of brutal laugh—an opening behind the wainscot of the long picture gallery; when the young fellow passed on into the next apartment and was followed by Mr. Babington, who made some excuse to the sheriff for leaving him for a few seconds.

The instant the two men met, their faces kindled, and the owner of Mendlip whispered—

“Thank God! I thought it was you, though you are so well disguised I could not be sure.”

“Is *he* here?” was the whispered query of the young man.

“Yes,” said Mr. Babington.

“He’ll be shot dead with as little remorse as the sheriff would feel in shooting a rabbit.”

“What can be done? In another minute all will be over!”

“Is escape quite impossible out of the house?” asked the youth.

“Quite.”

“I have it! But tell me, where can he hide just for a single instant, while he comes out, waits for them to come here, and then passes into that very hiding-place they have just quitted?”

“Excellent! If they should return to look at it, he can pass into another, for the two are connected by a way they did not discover. You see that cabinet,” continued Mr. Babington. “It stands just

a little from the wall. Let him glide out, and go behind that, till he sees they are all drawn here by this new discovery; then, if you will make an alarm, he may seize that moment to run across the few feet of space that takes him back into the Picture Gallery. The moment he crosses the threshold he can take shelter unobserved—that is, if your alarm draws all the men here.”

“Quick; let me see him,” said the sheriff’s unfaithful follower.

Mr. Babington went towards a vast old-fashioned chimney bulk in the centre of one side of the apartment. It was of brick, but blackened over. Touching something, a slice of the very brickwork itself—really solid brickwork, fastened at the back to heavy timber—swung open, and revealed a place only big enough for a single person, and which received light and air from a funnel that went up with the chimney, and had its top level with the chimney top—a terrible place, and used only in the last resort or the greatest necessity, for if a fire were lighted in the grate, the unhappy tenant would probably be roasted alive, unless he preferred to come out and be taken.

“Quick!” whispered Mr. Babington, putting in his head. “Friends!”

An instant after appeared at the opening the face of General Langton; and the first face he saw

was the face of Clarence Harvey; who had received information where the General was, had hurried down, had come upon the sheriff's party, and been warmly welcomed on account of the introduction he brought from Mr. Speke.

"Behind the cabinet," said Mr. Babington, pointing, "till you hear an alarm we shall raise to draw them out of your way! Then run into the Picture Gallery; the secret place is there open, and if you do not find yourself safe when you have closed it up, look for a knot in one corner of the floor; press it, and you will see the way to fresh shelter many yards distant by a secret route. Haste!"

They had but just time for the simultaneous movements made by the three men—General Langton to the back of the cabinet; Mr. Babington to the sheriff with an apology for his absence; and Clarence Harvey to the front of the wonderful chimney, which he began to handle curiously all over, as if in vehement suspicion there was something more than a chimney behind.

The sheriff, meantime, had been delayed in the Picture Gallery by a false scent that Clarence Harvey had set him on before leaving him. That shrewd young fellow had been convinced that a certain ornamental projection, pretending to be the end of an enormous beam that came out, high up the gallery wall, was really hiding-place No. 11.

The sheriff was struck with the fancy, and expended over it the time that enabled the bird so far to escape.

Seeing Clarence Harvey in the next room busy about the chimney bulk, the sheriff and his whole party, one man excepted, passed on towards him; but rather losing faith in the value of his discoveries since the last ignominious failure, the party did not stop; but went further on along the room, to Clarence Harvey's great satisfaction; till he saw one man lingering in the gallery, as if still studying hiding-place No. 10.

A happy and bold thought occurred to him.

He suddenly threw open the small, heavy, ponderous door of the concealed place; where the General had been, and shouted with all his might—

“I thought so! I've got it! Come, come, all of you! Such a discovery! Beats all the rest!”

Through this pretended excitement, which made the sheriff, even, forget his dignity, and run back to the chimney, Clarence Harvey had no eyes but for that solitary wretched man who would linger in the outer room.

So he went towards him, and said—

“The sheriff wants you. He has made such a discovery.”

“Has he? Oh, I'll come!”

And he went.

And then General Langton went also; boldly facing the group, not one of whom, however, saw him, so intent were they on hiding-place No. 11.

An hour later Mendlip House was restored to its former quiet: and General Langton, Mr. Babington, and Clarence Harvey were sitting together, congratulating themselves that the Jacobite armoury was safe in the cellars, and that the sheriff's visit had tended to avert suspicion for the future.

But when Clarence Harvey was able to speak to the General alone, and communicate his dreadful news—that, under cover of his (the General's) arrangements for an insurrection, a band of desperate men had planned the capture—meaning murder—of the king—all other subjects were forgotten; and for one whole night there was nothing but remorse, confusion, and hopeless despair in the brain of the noble adventurer.

What could he do?

They might strike even before he had time to do anything to save himself and his cause from such eternal infamy!



## CHAPTER III.

### THE EARL'S TOWN HOUSE.

THREE days more have passed.

Lady Hermia has retired for the night, weary of the guests she has been receiving in her father's name; weary of herself; weary even of the eternal thought, which she nevertheless persists in sedulously cherishing, that a happier end may yet be vouchsafed than life promises her.

She has partly undressed, and her maid has just begun to loosen out her long hair, when she is disturbed by a knock.

It is the housekeeper who has come up, with many apologies for the liberty she is taking, to say that Mistress Christina Constable is in the hall, urgently asking to be permitted to see Lady Hermia.

"At this time of night! Something serious must have happened. Bring her up instantly," said Lady Hermia.

Then she mused on the masquerade scene, and wondered whether it was that Christina was anxious to explain it; or whether it was that she had been

hurt by Lady Hermia's cold letter, putting off the arranged visit.

But that surely might be left for the hours of daylight. It must be mischief to *him*—to General Langton, Lady Hermia's unhappy husband.

"She—loving him, perhaps—flies to me, who also love him, and have a right to love him of which she knows nothing. Why is she so long?"

The door opened, and Christina entered, wearing a long black veil, which made it impossible to distinguish her features. Throwing it back, she revealed her sweet, fair face bathed in tears; and the moment the servant had gone away, she knelt down before the Lady Hermia, and said, imploringly—

"Oh, my dear lady and kind patroness, be good to me now, for I have no earthly hope but in you!"

"What is the nature of your hope?" demanded Lady Hermia; in a tone of voice little calculated to cheer the fainting energies of the poor maiden suppliant.

"General Langton."

"Ah, yes—I supposed no cause less potent would have brought you here at such an hour. You love him?"

"Oh, no! Only as a sister or dear friend might do! He has told me all!"

"Our child-marriage?"

"Yes."

"Then what brought you? Danger to him?"

"Not that only—dishonour to him—infamy to him—so he fears, if he cannot extricate himself from the vile web that has been woven about him."

And then Christina told the story of the murder plot as she had just received it from General Langton. And the looks of the two fair women as they glanced down that fearful vista of crime, bloodshed, and national convulsion, were full of an almost unearthly awe.

"What—what in the name of Heaven is to be done?" asked Lady Hermia.

"Oh, he soon settled that—it was the *how* that was so difficult. He made up his mind at once to reveal the plot to the king."

"Did he? Oh, may Heaven eternally bless him for that!" murmured the noble wife, while the tears sprang to her eyes.

"But," continued Christina, "now come the difficulties. So far from giving up the insurrection, he means, if challenged, to tell the king to his face, he will go on with it."

"Ah, that's my own, noble, chivalrous, but alas, most Quixotic husband! He is too good for such statesmen and kings as now exist. He will wreck himself by his own princely qualities. But how does he intend to get to the king?"

"Lady Hermia ——" began Christina.

"Lady me no more ladies. Call me Hermia, as I shall call you Christina. Now, I repeat my question—How will he reach the king?"

"Through you."

"Through me! Ah, yes, I thank him. Oh, how he outstrips me in all right and noble feeling! Indeed, I thank him—this is sweet! He rightly estimates me. Wait, dearest—wait a moment."

She rang her bell, and when her maid came, said in a tone of perfect quiet—

"My chair, instantly, to go to the palace—with a proper escort. Remember the hour, and the dangers of the streets. Quick! I wait.

"Now, Christina, darling, go on. Tell me quickly, but accurately, first what General Langton demands for himself by way of conditions; next, what he proposes as regards his revelations to the king."

"For himself, he demands these things:—That he comes and goes unknown. He will be masked. And he demands the king's own personal pledge of honour that he shall not be watched, followed, or obstructed in any way, under any circumstances whatever."

"That's his first condition. Go on."

"Next, that he be not required to name anyone of the persons concerned."

"That will be a difficulty."

"And, lastly, that he be at liberty, if he see any prospect of good by so doing, to warn the conspirators of what he has done after he has done it. These are his conditions, and if they are granted he will immediately appear before the king and place in his majesty's hands ample means to guard himself against the plot, and to punish the actors if he so pleases, should the plot really break out."

"Yes, all that is clear. Stay. Be silent for a minute. Let me make a few notes. I have a good memory, but playing with words when life and death are the stakes does not do."

Lady Hermia made her notes, read them aloud, corrected them in a minor point or two, and then said—

"Go on."

"Nay, I have done."

"Impossible! General Langton not ask for his rank and estates at such a time?"

"You forget, he is ——"

"Ah, me! I did indeed forget. He is a rebel and will remain one. Yes, of course he can therefore ask for nothing."

"Yes, that is so," assented Christina.

"Will you wait till I come back?" asked Lady Hernia.

"Will I? Yes, indeed, if it be not till this time

to-morrow night. But will the king see you at such an hour ? ”

“ Oh, yes—I must practise a ruse on His Majesty. If he knew I came in my own name, no power on earth could persuade him my business could be important enough to justify the waking him from his first slumber, in order to dress, and give me an interview.”

“ You do not intend to consult my lord your father ? ” said Christina, anxiously, who knew something of the earl’s hostile feeling.

“ No, no, indeed ! Fortunately, I have here a right of my own, and need not ask for any sanction. It is the wife who goes to act for her husband. Wish me well thought it. I felt strong a few minutes ago ; but now, as the event draws nearer, I begin to tremble.” Then, after a pause, she added—

“ What if that dreadful Chief of the Secret Service Department already knows all about it, and General Langton’s disclosure comes too late ! Might he not even become falsely but ruinously mixed up in the detestable business ? Ah, well, I must keep my brain cool, and avoid thinking of such things.”

Left by Lady Hermia in her bedchamber, that her presence might attract as little notice as possible, Christina spent a miserable time during the visit to

the king. He would refuse to see General Langton ; or he would see him, and keep his promise to the ear only, while those about him would secretly and craftily pursue him, discover his true rank and aims, and then, as Lady Hermia had suggested, mix him up with the very murderers he had denounced, on the plea that his policy had only been a trick to win the king's confidence.

It was, then, a wonderful relief when she saw the approaching torches, and the gates thrown open, and then, a minute later, Lady Hermia enter the bedroom, with a glad expression of success.

"The king promises all you ask," said she, "with this one exception—he will not consent to allow this gentleman, whoever he may be, to tell the assassins what he has done ; and, I own, I think the reason his majesty gives is decisive. Tell them of the failure of this plot, and they will give it up, and then secretly re-form their band and begin again. So, while the king quite appreciates this interesting Jacobite's reason for desiring to give his brother rebels a chance of escape, he thinks, and so do I, that such an indulgence is fatal to the whole proposal."

"Yes, yes ; I fear it is !" said Christina, sadly.

"You do not, surely, fear he will be unwilling to listen to reason ?"

"In most things he would ; but when it comes to

the giving up to death the men with whom he has sympathised for years——”

“ Sympathised ! ”

“ Ay ; but not in murder ! ”

“ No.”

“ Well,” continued Christina, “ he will be at the palace within the next two or three hours, if he comes at all, of which I am not very hopeful.”



## CHAPTER IV.

### AWAY TO THE KING.

AT the time of Lady Hermia's departure for the palace, her father was sitting in a large easy chair in his bedroom, wearing a richly-flowered dressing-gown, the gay pattern of which forced out into stronger prominence the harsh and pain-stricken expression of his face and limbs.

He was suffering the most acute anguish from an attack of gout. Earnshaw, his valet, had been tending him for some hours—applying cooling lotions; and in that and in other ways trying to mitigate the fury of the fire that burned in the earl's veins and nerves.

In a moment of comparative ease he had been beguiled with the fancy he could sleep, had gone to bed, and had finally told Earnshaw to go away. Now he was up again, raging with the pain, and scarcely less furious that his bell was not attended to.

Once, in one of the pauses of the attack, he fancied

he heard some commotion in the court-yard. Then lights blazed out. With great difficulty he dragged himself to the window, and then almost shouted, with the mixture of surprise and pain—

“Hermia! Going forth after midnight! Her chair, servants, torches—and I knowing nothing! What means this? She has heard something about that detestable traitor, Langton! Where is Earnshaw?”

Hobbling back to the bedside, he again pulled at the bell; nor did he leave it till Earnshaw made his appearance.

“You rascal!” shouted the infuriated Earl. “What has become of you?”

“Pardon me, my lord; rascal or no rascal, I have been engaged in *your* service.”

“Eh? How’s that? I am racked with pain—you mustn’t mind every angry word.”

“No, my lord; only I do wish to retain your respect, and ——”

“Yes, yes; quite right:—your present position is not to be the measure of your future one. It shall not. Well, you bring me news—I see it in your face.”

“Yes, my lord. Lady Hermia has had a visitor, who still remains here—Miss Constable—and now Lady Hermia ——”

“Has gone forth. I know—I saw the lights

just now, and went to the window. Whither has she gone ? ”

“ To Kensington—to the palace, my lord.”

“ To the palace ! ” cried the earl, leaping up, and forgetting alike his gout, lameness, and long agony. “ One question more. What can be the nature of the business that brings Sir Richard’s daughter to the palace ? ”

“ I can only venture to guess, my lord, by naming General Langton.”

“ Ha ! you think so, do you ? It was my own thought. Quick ! Help me to dress.”

“ You cannot, really, my lord, venture out in this state, at this time of the night, and in such a season.”

“ Nothing shall keep me from going out. Hasten the preparations. Wrap me up warmly—the king will excuse the unseemliness of my garb if he wants me, as I suspect he will when he has heard my daughter’s business. Stay, Earnshaw ! Can you at all divine the cause of Miss Christina’s interference ? ”

“ Only this. General Langton may have heard of Lady Hermia’s favourable feeling towards the knight’s daughter, got an introduction to her in consequence, then interested her, perhaps, in his story ——”

The earl interrupted him by saying—

"His story! Then you have ferreted out the whole matter, I suppose, as to his relations with my daughter?"

"Pardon me, my lord. I could not help when I noticed various sayings and doings of your lordship and of Lady Hermia, from putting this and that together, and——"

"And coming to certain conclusions:—no wonder."

Only a very short time after one chair has passed out through the great gates, with two link boys in front, and half a dozen tall stalwart footmen wearing swords, guarding the whole—only, we repeat, a few minutes after, followed a second chair, but with a diminished *cortège*; for even the earl's household could not suddenly find another half dozen footmen ready at so short a notice, and the earl would not wait.

Earnshaw walked by the side of the chair to render any help the earl might need, and to be ready to hold conversation with his master—a habit the valet assiduously cultivated.

"If the men ran you could keep up, couldn't you!" asked the earl.

"Assuredly, my lord!"

"Urge them on then."

The earl's chair reaches the palace, is admitted within the royal precincts, and presently a gentle-

man hurries down to pay his respects to the great earl.

"Has the king had a visitor, Mr. Cavendish?"

"Lady Hermia has been here, and gone away."

"Oh, then she did not see his majesty!"

"Oh, yes she did. The king had a concert, which continued very late. She was instantly admitted to him, and in about a quarter of an hour went away!"

The earl's looks and gestures were sufficiently impatient; but he restrained his words, and asked to see the king.

"'Tis unfortunate, my lord," said Mr. Cavendish, "that we must disturb him a second time, and the more so that I thought—and others thought so too—that his majesty is in great trouble about Lady Hermia's communications, notwithstanding they were so short a time together."

"That is enough. Say that the Earl of Bridgeminster, in all duty to the king, demands immediate audience!"

The king has left his small body of guests to enjoy the rest of the concert without him, and is pacing up and down a long gallery, from which a door opens to the royal bedchamber.

"Ha, Bridgeminster, this is well! What fortunate chance has brought you at the very moment when I most need your counsel?"

"The instinct of my loyalty, your majesty, no doubt!"

"Your daughter has just gone, after leaving with me, something that has banished even the possibility of sleep for many a long hour, I fear."

"Indeed, your majesty! May I ask what it is, for she has left me in entire ignorance?"

"Oh, it's only murder—or, perhaps, it might be more polite to call it assassination."

"Murder! Not—not of your sacred majesty's person! Not that, sire!"

"Lady Hermia brings me a quiet, carefully told story that I cannot possibly disbelieve, that a gentleman, for whose honour she pledges herself——"

At these words a change passed over the earl's face. He was conscious of it, and managed to turn his face away from the light, and throw it into shadow. The king went on:—

"Is prepared to come to me—but incognito—to narrate to me all the particulars of a plot for my murder—the day, the place, the chosen instruments all settled."

"Is he one of the band, who repents, or who desires to win favour by——"

"Nothing of the kind. I own I am strangely perplexed. He not only makes no conditions, but he does not disguise that he is a rebel, and means to

continue one ; but he cannot, it seems, go quite on to murder."

"Your majesty has consented?"

"Certainly."

"We will take care of all the rest." This was said in a peculiarly significant tone. The king, who was not remarkable for personal dignity of any kind, fidgeted about as if revolving in his mind the earl's words, and whether or not he ought to take action upon them.

At last, with a sigh, he said—and in a grand sort of manner, as if he was making part in a ceremonial—

"My lord, we have promised the Lady Hermia—have given her the royal word that he shall not be watched nor interrupted in his comings and goings—in short, that nothing shall be done even to identify him!"

"This is placing great trust, your majesty, in an unknown rebel!"

"My trust, Bridgeminster, is in your daughter. She tells me she feels the deepest interest in this man, though he is opposed to all her views; and she swears to me I may place the most absolute reliance on his word."

"Indeed, your majesty!"

"Of course you know him?"

"No, 'your majesty. I hold no converse with

rebels ; and I beg your majesty to look with forgiving eyes on this folly of my daughter's, for she is as devoted as myself to your royal person, your dynasty, and your government."

"We doubt it not. But the affair is very strange, is it not ? "

"It is indeed, your majesty. When does he come ! "

"This very night—soon—almost now. Though I am warned I *may* have to wait some time before he can arrive.'



## CHAPTER V.

### A BOLD CONSPIRATOR.

WEARY with useless speculations, the king and his favourite minister spent hour after hour looking for the mysterious visitor, who still did not come.

"Hark!" exclaimed the king, as the musical clock in the royal bedchamber struck four. "There are strange steps!"

The door opened, and Mr. Cavendish, the gentleman in attendance for the night, entered.

"May it please your majesty, there is a gentleman in the ante-chamber, bringing a message from Lady Hermia Bridgeminster to the effect that your majesty expects him."

"Admit him," said the king.

"But please, your majesty, he is masked."

"We are aware of that, Mr. Cavendish," said the king in that foreign and unpleasant tone and manner which made a contemporary say he was a hero to his troops but a wet blanket to his courtiers.

Mr. Cavendish looked very uncomfortable and very unwilling to fulfil the king's bidding, so turned

in his distress, to the Earl of Bridgeminster, who said—

“What is the matter, Mr. Cavendish? His majesty will, I am sure, be glad to hear anything you have to say.”

“This man, my lord, is dangerous!”

“Dangerous!” echoed the king.

“Yes, your majesty. We know nothing of him; he will give us no name, he professes no loyal feeling, and there is something in his attitude that strikes me as audacious in such a place, and so near the august person of your majesty.”

“Have you examined him, to see if he carries weapons about him?” asked William.

“No; if it please your majesty, he would not permit me to do so; and to one who came using the name of Lady Hermia, we did not think it right to use force. Or rather, your majesty, we did try, and he said he was here on the express understanding that he was to be personally respected.”

The king looked dubiously towards the earl, and the earl responded by looking just as dubiously, towards the king.

“If,” interposed the earl, “it were any other person whatever than Lady Hermia—even the daughter of a man of my own rank—ay, and even if enjoying your majesty’s personal favour, I should decidedly say, Do not, oh, my dear sovereign, risk

your life, so precious to us all, and so vitally necessary to England ! But it is my daughter, and I can in my own case go no farther."

"Then, if we refuse to see him, do we understand, my lord, that we shall have only to make our peace with Lady Hermia ; and that you, our faithful servant, to whom we are so much indebted, will not be in any way aggrieved ? "

"Assuredly, your majesty. Lady Hermia did not consult me ; so, as she began, she can finish the matter alone ! "

"And if we refuse, how are we to be enlightened with regard to this alleged plot ? "

"Oh, your majesty, we will bring him to terms, if only he be left us."

"You mean that our royal word——"

"Must not be too literally dealt with," said the earl, boldly. "Your majesty is in danger—the nation is in danger. Nothing can exceed the generosity of your majesty to this man ; if, then, he is so great an ingrate that he will not even satisfy your majesty's faithful servants that he comes with no murderous weapons concealed about his person, then I think your majesty ought to put aside your noble and truly princely impulses, and say, 'The good of the state demands a painful sacrifice from me.'"

The king, however, still hesitated. Presently he said—

"Will your lordship go out with Mr. Cavendish, and try whether, by speaking to him softly, respectfully, and making proper use of Lady Hermia's name, you cannot persuade him to consent to be searched?"

The two accordingly went out, and returned in a minute, to say, through Mr. Cavendish, the earl remaining silent—

"He positively declines to submit to personal indignity of any kind; but he speaks most earnestly; and declares he carries nothing whatever concealed about him that can by any possibility be used for evil purposes."

"Do you believe him, Mr. Cavendish?" asked the king.

"If any lesser personage than your majesty were concerned, I believe I should be inclined to trust him," was Mr. Cavendish's cautious reply.

"And you, my lord?"

"I am bound, sire, if you put the question in that way, and shut out all other considerations, to say that it is *my daughter* who vouches for him."

"I think we must venture," said the king.

"Permit me, then, to make preparations," responded the earl; and, without waiting for an answer, he withdrew a few paces, and summoned Mr. Cavendish to join him, To him he said—

"Plant a file of soldiers in the gallery. Tell them the moment the stranger enters to cover him with their pieces. You stay with them. Keep their officer by your side. Don't for a single instant cease to look on me; and, if I raise my right arm high above my head, shoot the traitor down, for I shall then have seen danger. Mr. Cavendish, we are dutiful servants of the king, but our duty is to guard him even before obeying his words, if we should see danger which he did not anticipate. You think so?"

"Most certainly, my lord."

"Go, then, quick! Stay! You note where his majesty now stands?"

"Yes."

"I will take care that the king shall remain there. I will have the stranger placed opposite him, and with full ten feet space between them. Now, to render accidents impossible, put the soldiers so behind the screen that partially crosses the front of the gallery from the left side there, that they will not even be able to see the king, but only the masked visitor."

"I understand, my lord. An excellent arrangement, for it might have made the soldiers nervous to fire so near to the king, if they saw him exposed. Of course, under this arrangement, they cannot hurt him."

"Hardly, I think," said the earl, with a smile, that soon flickered out as Mr. Cavendish went to fulfil his commission, and the earl himself prepared to rejoin the king.

But he went first to one of the windows, as if to look out while revolving mentally in a spirit of caution all eventualities. Shall we say what secret motive really prompted the movement?

The earl, then saw, with mingled feelings of fear and exultation, the moment arrive when it might be in his power to compass what had been for many years the one cherished, darling object of his life—the making away with his rebel son-in-law, for he did not for a moment doubt who the stranger was.

How easy now, when the man was before the guns, to make a mistake, and give the signal!

How easy even to force from the man some impetuous gesture by insult; covert, and veiled possibly from the king, but understood by Langton—a gesture that would naturally alarm the loyal; and then what loyal man could afford to pause even to think?

Still, the king's word had been given!

The king also was unmanageable about that royal word of his; partly, perhaps, from knowing the lady to whom it had been given.

Was the earl prepared to brave the danger of being thrown overboard, after he might have rendered

the greatest possible service to the dynasty?—to be held up as the man who had at once murdered the confiding stranger and his own king's reputation?

Perhaps not, if he had only these things to think of. But he hated Langton personally—he wanted to enjoy in quiet the Langton estates, given to him by the king; he wanted to bring to an end all possible connection between him and Hermia.

His head drooping a little with the weight of such thoughts, his face recovering its usual aspect of the stern, the harsh, and the inscrutable, he re-joined the king.

At this moment the king had turned his face towards the gallery, where he saw, with surprise, a file of soldiers enter from the right side, led by Mr. Cavendish, saw them all cross to the left side, and disappear behind the partial screen in front.

The earl, in brief, low tones explained the arrangements, which pleased the king very much; and gave him, as he said, entire confidence to deal with this rebel as he deserved if he should prove unreasonably contumacious.

"Let the stranger be admitted," said the king, in a loud voice.

The king took up his appointed place; and the Earl of Bridgeminster, in order to make more sure the line of demarcation, caused one of the ushers to draw a red cord across at the exact point where the

stranger was to stand, so that he might be obliged to keep the distance agreed on, and the king be reminded at all times during the conversation of the spot that he must not even approach.

Then there was a loud knock outside from the usher's wand, the door opened, and the usher advanced, telling the stranger to bow three times as he approached.

The stranger did give a slight obeisance once, and that was all, then followed his conductor to the place assigned.

He was dressed in dark clothes, and wore over all a long black cloak, trimmed with sable. His face was masked ; and the mask was evidently most carefully put on, and so fastened as to leave no possibility of its accidental removal.

Through the black mask the eyes gleamed brightly, and looked searchingly round.

They were at once arrested by the glitter of polished metal in the gallery, just behind the screen.

He moves back a step, a little farther away from the red cord, that he may the better see the meaning of the phenomenon, and so moves farther from the king, and by the same movement brings himself more perfectly under the line of the soldiers' fire.

Yes, he sees the officer and his bright sword, the soldiers and their muskets—he sees and understands all.



Then, throwing back his cloak by a graceful motion of his arms, he revealed a slender but powerful frame, of good, though not remarkable height, and thus stood facing the king.

His eyes, glancing penetratingly, meet the king's glance.

He makes a low, respectful bow, but stops with that. The stubborn knee shows no sign of grace.

"It is the king, sir!" said the earl, sternly.

"So I judged," replied the stranger, calmly, and taking no further notice of the earl.

"You wish to see me?" said the king.

"I did. Pardon me if I decline to pay the homage due to kings, for I recognise only a different sovereign."

"Treason! This is treason!" loudly exclaimed the earl; and Mr. Cavendish in the gallery had a mist before his eyes for the moment, as he saw the possibility of the arm of the earl rising for the signal.

To the earl's sinister cry of "Treason!" and the movement that accompanied it, showing that he was half-prepared to give the signal to the soldiers to fire, the king responded by—

"Hush! my lord. We stand here to listen to him. Let him go on."

"But," continued the stranger, again disregarding the interruption, "if I do not now pay the homage

due to a sovereign, I hope I best show my profound individual respect by avoiding to pay those other tributes which, belonging only to persons inferior to kings, might be esteemed from me insulting. I disclaim from my heart—from my inmost soul—the smallest desire to do *that!*”

“Proceed!” said the king, with a slight change of tone, as if the last few words had in some degree modified the feeling produced by the previous ones.

“I am ready when these soldiers have been marched out. There can be no listeners—none, at least, other than your most intimate adviser, and such I presume this gentleman to be.”

“That is the Earl of Bridgeminster,” said the king.

“He is welcome!” said the stranger, with an air as lofty and self-assured as if doing the honours of his own house and receiving a distinguished guest.

“Why do you object to the presence of the soldiers?” demanded the earl.

“I shall not object if the demand that Lady Hermia made, and which was refused, be now granted.”

“What was that?” demanded the earl.

“That I am to be at liberty to warn the men concerned in the business of which I have to speak of their danger, so that they may give up the scheme if they will.”

"Impossible ! Quite impossible !" said the earl.

"The soldiers' presence, then, is equally impossible."

"Why ?"

"They may overhear. And, as I desire and demand that at least the men I am about to denounce shall be at liberty to retire from their guilty scheme, should they do so of their own accord and without warning—as I yet trust they may before it is too late—they might be prevented if their names became known to various persons."

"You come, then, prepared to specify the men by name ?" said the earl.

"I do, but solely because I find it impossible otherwise to secure myself, my king, my cause, from the ineffaceable stain that such an infamous crime would fix on us all."

The king and the earl now conversed for a brief space in low tones—too low and too distant for General Langton to distinguish what they said.

The king was inclined to let the soldiers go away.

The earl conjured his majesty to do nothing of the kind.

Did not the wonderful boldness, he asked, and fearlessness of the man show how dangerous he must be if he were playing them false ?

Let the king look at it a moment in that light. Suppose this man to be himself a fanatic—an assas-

sin, what a superb stroke of policy, was it not?—that brought him there to-night within a few feet of the king, possibly armed with a loaded pistol, possibly prepared, besides, to leap the frail barrier of the red cord, and plunge a deadly weapon in the royal breast, and then in the confusion and general alarm give the signal for insurrection?

Again the earl strove, by the king's permission, to persuade the black masker to yield the point, reminding him that he might be armed; and that whether two or a dozen persons knew of what he was about to reveal, it could make little difference, for every one should be bound over, under the heaviest penalties His Majesty could inflict, to keep silence.

"My lord," said the stranger, "time passes. I wish to disburden myself of this perilous secret; I wish to be outside these walls; I do not breathe freely within them. No Jacobite can!"

"You, sire, are fairly warned," whispered the earl. "No more desperate rebel have I ever encountered in the course of a long life."

Seeing this private communion, the stranger said suddenly, as if guessing its meaning—

"What is it you fear? Me? Come, then! I will vouchsafe to the Earl of Bridgeminster, for Lady Hermia's sake, what I had refused and would still refuse to any but him and his princely master."

"You mean——?" began the earl.

"I submit myself to your search, on the understanding you do not touch my mask; *that* I should resent."

Strange to say, this seemingly fair offer did not please the earl at all. So again he whispered—

"Sire, I must, in devotion to you, absolutely refuse to be a witness or accessory to your being left unguarded in the presence of a man whom I believe to be dangerous."

"Do you still believe that?" demanded the royal lips with a half smile.

"It is not till now I have really felt a serious fear. Pray, sire, let me speak to him!"

As the king made no sign, the earl said aloud—

"What you ask is clearly inadmissible, whatever your motive may be. My royal master stands here King of England, and, as king, having duties that he is not permitted to put aside for purely personal reasons. The king desires me to say that he earnestly wishes to interpose no obstacle to your performing your duty in your own way; but I, as one of His Majesty's advisers, say I cannot consent; nor do I think that you, as a man of sense—as a man of the world—ought to ask it. I am sure your own king, if I may, under protest, for a moment, use such a phrase, merely to put myself on your ground—I say your own king would not, I am certain, under similar

circumstances admit an avowed enemy to a conference with all his natural guardians shut out."

"Your king, I see, is unarmed," said the stranger. "Let him arm himself. You are armed, my lord: two to one. Do you still fear?"

"I will not discuss with you! you grow insolent!" said the earl, as if eager to quarrel.

The earl's eyes began to turn to the gallery, and there was a dangerous light in them, as if he were saying to himself—

"Now or never!"

But a moment's reflection showed him he must at least temporise a few minutes longer till he could secure the secret of the plot and afterwards create sufficient excuse—sufficient provocation—for the meditated blow, which grew only the more attractive the more he dwelt on it.

This very thought changed his manner when he saw the stranger did not answer the provocation. It gave a suavity to his gestures and voice when he next addressed the stranger:—

"Do not mistake me. I quite recognise in your tone what ought to be the tone of an honest man—"

"It is an honest man, earl, who speaks to you!" said the stranger, with almost rude interruption.

"Yes, I am willing to believe it. Why, then, do you not help me over these preliminary difficulties, instead of planting yourself immovably upon them?"

"I wish to deal in that spirit," said the mask.

"Why, then, not content yourself with my assurance that the soldiers in the gallery cannot possibly hear you?"

"Indeed!" said the black mask inquiringly.

"You note the distance!" continued the earl.

"Very well. If you and your king are prepared to let them know or risk their knowing such portions of my story as might, when heard by anyone of their number, enable him to warn all the other conspirators——"

"The other conspirators!" exclaimed the king, in sudden and violent emotion. "Do you intend to reflect on the loyalty of my guards?"

The black mask leaned a little over the red cord, and whispered, in accents that easily penetrated to the ear alike of the king and minister, the startling words—

"There is one man among your guards who has been in constant communication with the conspirators; and that man may now, for aught I know, be in yonder gallery!"

If a bomb-shell had fallen in the presence-chamber, it could hardly have produced more alarm than did these words.

The king, with a calm white face, turned to the earl, who strove to seem impassive, and to smile off the fear, but could not.

The earl and the king went again into close conversation, and presently the former walked over to the stranger and said—

“You have now given an unanswerable reason for *our* taking care that no one *shall* overhear. When I am satisfied, will you be so too?”

“Yes, only I warn you, I will take care to say things that will cause your treachery, if——”

“Treachery!”

“Nay—I only suppose against you what you suppose against me; so we are equal.”

“I think we do not love each other,” said the earl, in a voice too low for the king to hear.

“Could you see my face, I should not need to answer other than by a smile. As it is, I own you are right.”

The stranger turned his back on the earl, and the latter walked away.

Did the earl, in thus speaking to the stranger, forget himself, and, while needing all his statesman-craft, play the boy—the mere irritable, angry, vengeful boy?

Hardly. The astute earl knew perfectly well what he was about. By that sort of experimental shot or thrust he had (so he believed) made his enemy reveal himself beyond all chances of mistake: he felt sure, now, the mask concealed the face of General Langton, his hated son-in-law.



He had also done some little towards creating the antagonistic feeling that even he, the most cold-blooded of statesmen, felt to be necessary before murdering him.

A minute or two passed in mute suspense; then the earl was seen to enter the gallery. At the moment of his appearance there, the king, as if by pre-arrangement spoke to General Langton a sentence or two of little importance, and in a noticeably louder voice than he had used before. The earl chatted for a few seconds with Mr. Cavendish; said he had done right to give the soldiers rests for their guns, and to relieve them from their duty while he (the earl) was away from his post; then warned him once more to keep his own eyes and theirs fixed and ready for the signal to fire; smiled towards the soldiers, as if he in thought patted them on the backs and said, "Well done my good fellows! the king and I trust you;" then descended once more to the saloon, and joined the king, after a glance at the gallery which showed him the muzzles all pointing as before.

"Did your majesty speak in a lower tone?" was his first remark.

"No; higher!"

"Then we are quite safe. The voices of both came but as a confused buzz: plain enough as mere sounds—perfectly unintelligible as words."

“Tell him so,” said the king, “and let us see if the sphinx will now unriddle.”

The earl again advanced towards the silent, stately, sombre-looking figure, and said—

“I could distinguish nothing.”

“Very well. The king spoke more loudly. Suppose we all now speak less loudly; then we shall have double security. If I speak too low, remind me.”

At the same moment the king and his minister in their extreme anxiety, that nothing should be overheard, advanced; sensibly lessening the distance between them and the stranger.

And then began General Langton to speak to the weighty matter in hand:—

“I have to demand the renewal to myself personally of the pledges given to Lady Hermia, and which alone brought me here. The first point—personal to myself—I will speak of last. I yield the second point, and will give up the names of the parties concerned, on the pledge that, if they do not after all let their plot break out into any overt act they shall not then be molested or punished on account of this plot, which I now denounce. Is that granted?”

“It is,” said the earl, after a brief consultation with the king. “You pledge yourself that, neither directly nor indirectly, you will give them the least

inkling of this plot being known to the Government?"

"To that I solemnly pledge myself, if my demand be granted."

"I repeat, it is granted," said the earl.

"Let your king, then, say so," observed the black mask.

"We grant it," said the king.

"And I, on my part, fully acknowledge that to warn them of what I am doing is simply to put it into their power to modify their plans, and so ultimately to proceed with them to the same end."

The king bowed.

"Now as to myself:—My first condition was, and is, that, as I came hither unknown, so I go away unknown; that I shall not be watched, or followed, or obstructed in any way, under any circumstances whatever, now or hereafter."

"You mean, provided——" interposed the earl.

"Yes, thank you, provided I now give, to the best of my power, a true and faithful account of the plot formed against the present occupant of the English throne. Is that clearly understood, beyond possibility of mistake, and is the pledge ready to be given to me?"

"Suppose you were to take it into your head to threaten the king, and say you would yourself go

from this very place to raise the standard of civil war?" asked the earl.

"Then he and you will have to stomach the statement as well as you both can. I go free—rebel or no rebel!"

There was something in this that pleased the heroic side of the king. He smiled, and his face became obviously more genial. Not so the earl:—

"And you ask immunity beforehand, do you, for that?" demanded the earl, in a tone of scorn, that almost amounted to mocking laughter.

"No; I ask nothing of that kind. 'Fall back—fall edge!' as an ancestor of mine said, in the civil wars of the last century, when his good faith was in question, and he had to face the possibility of the scaffold, the executioner, and the axe."

"What, then, was your demand?"

"Simply, that in coming here, to do you and your master a great service, I might at least be assured that the service itself should not endanger me now or hereafter."

The quiet scorn of his reply cut deeper than the bitter scorn of the previous speech.

Unconsciously the earl found himself facing the gallery, and with arms nervously twitching to rise and give the signal, if only he could see how.

Ah! yes; the how was not at all clear; seemed, indeed, to be moving farther and farther off.

The king was the first to speak :—

“ I know not what you may be to the prince whom you call king, but I do not flatter you when I say that, if you served me as you seem prepared to serve him, I should feel myself a proud monarch to have so brave and devoted a servant ! ”

“ Is my condition accepted ? ” demanded the black mask, after a pause, and in a tone of unusual gentleness.

“ It is,” said the king.

“ In the plain, literal meaning of the words, and not as words may be spoken and twisted and understood by the craft of juggling statesmen—no disrespect to the Earl of Bridgeminster ? ”

“ In that sense your conditions are accepted, and our royal word sacredly and irrevocably pledged never to harm you, or allow you to be harmed now or hereafter, on account of this interview.”

“ And I, having intentionally thus far desired to preclude myself from misconception, even if esteemed guilty of discourtesy, may now speak more at my ease ; and protesting, once for all, against any claim for loyalty from me, under present circumstances——”

The king and earl exchanged glances, as if speculating on the hidden meaning of these last words, while the stranger went on—

“ I shall, simply as a matter of courtesy and of

personal and profound individual respect, not henceforward debar myself from acknowledging the fact that the prince I now address is, *de facto*, King of England!"

The king's face quite shone again, as he listened to this, which was said with manly dignity.

Nor was the effect diminished when the black mask added—

"Pardon me, your majesty, if I seem to remember too keenly the constant necessity for self-assertion of my loyalty; for, alas! while you are great, rich, fortunate, my unhappy master sits low on the floor of adversity, dust and ashes upon his sacred head, with only a few faithful ones to comfort him. Can your majesty wonder if I desire, while it is possible, to be one of the few?"

"No," said the king, with some warmth; "but I must beg of you to proceed, or I may, under the stress of your eloquence and character, turn Jacobite myself, which I suppose you don't expect or require?"

"No, indeed, your Majesty," responded the stranger, with a tone that almost expressed the hidden smile.

The earl had listened to all this with extreme irritation. The king was obviously going the way that was exactly opposite to the road he wanted him to take. So he tried a diversion.

"The gentleman," said he, aloud, "will, of course, be prepared to testify in open court what he is going to——"

"The gentleman will be prepared for nothing of the kind," was the instantaneous rejoinder. "Neither is the gentleman prepared to have any the least thing expected from him other than he has offered."

" 'A wilful man must have his way,' " ejaculated the king. "Remember the proverb, Bridgeminster, and, in heaven's name, let us proceed."

In a low, monotonous tone, as if he desired to veil whatever emotion the tale he had to tell was calculated to excite, the black mask then began.

He spoke slowly, carefully choosing his words, so as to use very few of them.

And thus he spake—

"On a certain Saturday, your majesty's hunt day, forty men, well armed—all picked men, brave, desperate, and, for the most part, honestly fanatical, therefore the more dangerous—will waylay your majesty at a convenient place, which is already fixed; will then, so the idea goes, make your majesty a prisoner, after overthrowing all opposition, and carry you off to France."

"Unless his majesty should happen to be too troublesome," said the earl.

"Exactly," responded the black mask. "They

expect that trouble, and will be disappointed if they don't get it."

"And if they do get it?" queried the earl.

"They will murder him. In fact, I do not disguise from your majesty, they mean murder and nothing else, or I should not have been here."

"Which Saturday?" asked the king, as soon as he could command his voice.

"The next; but they are prepared to postpone from Saturday to Saturday, week after week, if they see occasion. They are under a man who will not let them strike till he feels sure of the blow, and who will strike then, if God and man alike challenge the deed."

"And who is this new hero of assassination?" demanded the king.

"Sir George Charter."

"My God, is it possible!" exclaimed the king, with an agitation that surprised both the listeners.

"Why is your majesty so struck?" asked the minister. "We have long known him as a most pestilent rebel."

"Yes, that is true," said the king; "but still I did not think it conceivable that any—any gentleman of the party could be found capable of this. It shows how frightful is the danger we have escaped—even if it be yet escaped! I could understand meaner men—poor, disbanded, discontented wretches



—as ready for any deed of violence, even one so atrocious as this; but Sir George Charter—— It is too, too horrible!”

The king turned his face from them, and was evidently quite overpowered with emotion, and for a moment there was a pause.

“Where is the spot?” asked the earl, in a low tone.

“The precise spot where His Majesty is accustomed to land, on recrossing the river at Turnham Green, in returning from the chase at Richmond.”

“It is well chosen!” said the earl. “Your majesty has then only your guard—and half of those are left behind on the other side. Forty such mere cut-throats as this gentleman describes——”

“I described no mere cut-throats,” said the stranger. “There are men among them whom I would trust, apart from this horrible infatuation, with my life, my honour, my all!”

“He’s little better than one of them, your majesty!” whispered the earl.

“No, no,” replied the king. “But go on—we must learn everything!”

“Well, sir,” said the earl, loudly, “we wait for you to fulfil your compact—the names!”

“Their leader you know—Sir George Charter. The next in importance is the Earl of Stanbury.”

“Stanbury!” said the king, with renewed emotion.

"Why the man swore to me, in my private closet, he had given up all his rebel inclinations, and desired only our personal favour. Note him well, Bridgeminster."

The earl held tablets in his hand, and was writing. Hence the remark of the king, the vindictive meaning of which was perfectly understood.

"Sir William Larkyns I name next," said the stranger.

"What, the gouty lawyer! He one of the forty thieves!" exclaimed the earl—again trying, by the sarcasm, to irritate the informer.

"No. I was about to say that both these men, and another—Maltby, the rich brewer—are confessedly hostile to the scheme, and only submit to it because they will not injure their comrades by exposure."

"Do they lend no aid in other ways?" asked the king—"say by the sanction of their rank, by money, arms——"

"And beer!" interposed the earl.

"Had I believed they did not help, your majesty would not have had their names from me to-night. I know they do help—indirectly. But I also know they did object at first."

"Note all that, Bridgeminster. Pity if any good points should be lost in their favour!" said the king, with bitter sarcasm. "True nobles and gen-

tlemen, are they not—shrinking from horror at the thought of firing the murderous pistol, but buying, no doubt, the weapon themselves, and taking care of its temper and quality! The king thanks them! Will you, sir, proceed?”

“A Jesuit—whose name and person are quite unknown to me, but who comes direct from Rome to hallow the murderous deed—as I, a Catholic, now live unhappily to say.”

The General then for the first time bent his head in deep emotion.

“A Jesuit?” queried the earl.

“Of course! of course!” said the king. “Trust a Jesuit to find out the scent of blood, even if he does not originate the whole business. Put down the Jesuit, Bridgeminster. Who next?”

“Keyes—one of your majesty’s own guards—a trumpeter!”

It was startling to see the commotion this name produced. The king and the earl again whispered together for more than a minute.

Well might the mention of that name excite the greatest dread. If one were false—one among the men to whom the king at all times confided the question of his personal safety—if one such were in the ranks, how many more might there not be? And possibly the taint might be spreading to other of the household regiments. It was indeed an

appalling incident, slight as it looked, when merely introduced as "Keyes—one of your majesty's own guards—a trumpeter."

"Do you know his regiment? Can he be upstairs in the gallery now? Have you ever heard anything about him?" Such were the hurried and whispered questions put by the sovereign to the minister.

The minister, in reply, was constrained to say he knew nothing about him, but would take care to seek information the moment the king set him at liberty. The earl then asked for the rest of the names.

"There are only two others known to me of sufficient importance to mention now; but I beg herewith to hand you a list of the whole. It was difficult to obtain; and had I been less determined to free myself and my cause from the slightest danger of contamination, I should not have ventured the effort. But there it is."

The earl approached the cord, took the paper from the stranger's hand, went with it to the king, and there, forgetting etiquette in the absorbing interest of the moment, he looked over the shoulder of the king while he read.

Apparently the king saw nothing in the list to strike him, so he gave it to the earl and began to walk about, evidently absorbed in the thought of his household troops being thus tampered with.

Seeing that the king, in these short paces to and fro, occasionally ventured too near the cord, the earl became doubly alarmed for his secret project—alarmed lest the sight of the king, if the soldiers but once saw him, should paralyse their action at the critical moment; alarmed, also, lest, if they did fire at his signal, the king really might get into danger.

The stranger now spoke:—

“There are two names in the list about which I wish to say a word. Scum Goodman is one of those wretches whom it were a charity to sweep from the world, I mean with legitimate cause. He is the only man among those who are likely to be prominent who deserves the opinion of the Earl of Bridgeminster—cut-throat and thief. But he is no coward; and will probably, like a wild cat, endeavour, even in exposure or death, to give the last scratch. Beware of him!”

“Note him carefully, Bridgeminster,” again said the king.

“The only other man of whom I have to speak—Noel——” Here the stranger paused, as if meditating his words with extreme care.

“Ah! yes,” said the earl. “I’m glad to have him. Does your majesty know the man?”

“No,” said the king.

“Permit me, then, to congratulate your majesty

on the knowledge that this Noel is the man who has printed all those infamous libels on your majesty and your majesty's government!"

"He!" echoed the king, and obviously much impressed.

"Yes, your majesty. With really extraordinary skill and daring, he has for years kept at work a secret press; and this we only discovered and broke up quite lately; when, unluckily, the man himself escaped."

"Note him, Bridgeminster."

"Ay, my lord," said the stranger, "and please also to note against the name that, while I demand that he be left absolutely free and untroubled——"

"Absurd!" almost shouted the earl, interruptingly.

"Absolutely free and untroubled!" repeated the stranger, in deep, clear, bell-like tones,—“While I demand this let it be added that I also venture to express a hope that he will not, on the contrary, be admitted to favour!”

"Favour! What does the man mean?" angrily asked the king of the earl.

"I mean, your majesty, that, but for this man's treachery to his associates, you might have gone next Saturday to your fate!"

"Is that possible?" asked the king, open-mouthed.

"It is so. I call him treacherous, because it was no scruple of honour or remorse, no awakening instinct of humanity, that caused him to expose them. No; it was the old, eternal story—love of a woman! He told her, and through her the story reached my servant, who told me. There my story ends."

Not so, however. Details were asked for and given; the arrangements for the attack were explained; and the same topics were repeatedly gone over again, in the feverish anxiety of the king that no single fact of any importance should remain unknown.

To every question the stranger gave a frank though brief answer; so long, at least, as the questions did not seem wide of the mark.

But he soon perceived that, while the king's thoughts were exclusively fixed on the horrible plot just made known; the earl, on the contrary, seemed to be striving to penetrate the veil that covered the other plot—of the insurrection.

Then the black mask stopped abruptly, saying—

"I have answered every question that can possibly be necessary to your king's safety; I now decline to submit any longer to interrogation."

"Then let me tell you, sir," said the earl, carefully modulating his voice to the tone of greatest possible offence without show of violence, "that you thus expose yourself to terrible suspicion."

"What suspicion?" demanded the stranger; who carefully watched all the earl's movements, and whose eye had more than once followed the earl's eye to the gallery.

"The suspicion that you cannot be dealing in good faith, or you could have nothing to conceal."

"My lord, I have nothing more to say to you. We may meet under other circumstances, and then pursue such discussions on more equal terms. Were I in this presence to quarrel with you, who knows what mistakes might be made? What a calamity, for instance, were it not, to a man like your lordship, so distinguished in the rolls of honour and of *fidelity to friends*——"

The earl started, as if stung by an adder that he had accidentally trodden on. But he kept silence, even while a dark spot appeared on his cheek, and grew larger and larger as he listened.

"What a calamity, if a gentleman of such nice honour should happen to fancy that the king was struck at instead of himself!"

"Sire," interposed the earl, white with rage to see his hidden secret discovered, and probably made valueless, "sire, the whole of the conditions promised to this gentleman were based, I believe, on the antecedent condition that he dealt truly with us.—told us all that we needed to know!"



"Undoubtedly," said the king; looking, however, very uncomfortable at the prospect before him.

"And I have done so," said the stranger.

"It is false," deliberately said the earl.

"False!" echoed the stranger, and for a moment he seemed as if he would leap the barrier and——. But he checked himself, and, with studied and remarkable calmness, said—

"Is it your majesty's pleasure that I go hence with insult as my sole reward?"

"Bridgeminster——" doubtfully began the king.

"Sire, I will now prove the untrustworthiness of this man. All the parties whose names he has written on this list were at the masquerade; the object of the masquerade is now happily made known to us; but, unhappily for this gentleman's credit, there were also other parties at the masquerade whose names he has carefully concealed. Myself and my son, as I may now for the first time tell you, ventured, in your majesty's behalf, into that nest of Jacobites; and so obtained information which this stranger, if honest, would also have given."

Here the earl came nearer, and whispered to the king the name of Sir Richard Constable as one of the most dangerous of men—because popular in the City, likely to become Lord Mayor, and enjoying at once the confidence of the loyal party and of the

Jacobites—the former because they supposed him to have quite outgrown his early political predilections; the latter, because they knew he was secretly devoted to their cause, and waiting to serve them.

“Was Sir Richard Constable at the masquerade?” asked the king, aloud, of the black mask.

“He was; as an innocent visitor, supposing the assembly simply a masquerade.”

“How are we to be assured of that?”

“You have my word. If you value it for one thing, you must not undervalue it for another. Am I now at liberty?”

There was a pause, and much whispering, consultation, and delay before the question was answered.

“Am I now at liberty?” again demanded the stranger.

The king moved a pace or two nearer to him, and said,—

“I believe you have done ourselves and the State a great service, and the king thanks you, and only regrets you leave it impossible for him to repay you as kings should.”

The stranger bowed low in silence.

“But having said that, let me ask you to consider seriously a request from my minister—that you abide here for a few days, to aid us with your counsel—to ensure us of your own safety, and——”

"—And, your majesty, to give myself in pledge for my own honesty! I decline, and positively refuse. I shall stay no longer question."

"Farewell, then, my lord," said the king.

"Farewell, your majesty. I go in full reliance on your royal word."

"It cannot be permitted," said the earl, aloud. "This step is absolute proof that he plays us false—is putting us on a false scent while he matures insurrection. Yes, your majesty," loudly exclaimed the earl, and seeming the while to be transported with patriotic alarm and indignation, "I see the whole plot! It is a juggle from beginning to end. The true plot is one to dethrone your majesty. I know that arms, horses, and ammunition are being collected. I know that the rebels have a desperate leader—most likely the man now before your majesty. Shall we let him go, when we have him—when we know he is playing us false? Impossible! General Langton, I arrest you, as a traitor, in the king's name."

"General Langton!" echoed the king, in profound astonishment.

"Yes; I challenge him, in spite of his motley disguise. He is the traitor who now brings over foreign troops—who is now consorting with and abetting every pestilent rogue and vagabond that can be found in your majesty's dominions."

The black mask's frame was evidently convulsed with some powerful emotion as he stood there dark, silent, inscrutable. Presently he said,—

“Your majesty will, no doubt, know how to punish him who, worse than the murderers whom I denounce, is not content with stabbing your body. This man, this earl, stabs your majesty in a dearer part—your honour! So, your majesty, I leave him with contempt unutterable!”

Then he turned, folded his arms, and walked away.

“I ask only to detain him,” hurriedly whispered the earl. “It is vital to your majesty's throne and safety.”

“Can you do it without—what—what he says?”

“Dishonouring your majesty? Perish the man who could think such a thought as that your majesty could dishonour yourself. A moment, and it will be too late.”

“Try to arrest him, but not to endanger him.”

General Langton had reached the doors, and was trying confusedly to open them.

While doing so he heard a bolt drawn on the other side. This was done at a signal from the earl.

General Langton struck loudly on the door, and cried out,—

“Open in your king's name! He is in danger!”

"Danger! What danger?" cried the earl, advancing as if to lay hands on him.

"You would not understand it!" said General Langton, suddenly confronting the earl. "It is only that of being infamous!"

"Villain! Dare you in this very presence, tell me my sovereign is infamous! Old as I am, I have blood enough to rebel against that outrage. I arrest you!"

He put his hand on General Langton's shoulder, who shook him off with such violence that the aged lord was thrown down on the marble floor, and to a distance of two or three yards.

Thus prostrate, he lifted his right hand high above his head, as if appealing for succour.

The signal, or the supposed signal, was taken, and in a moment more the bold adventurer would, as the earl concluded, have fallen, the target of a dozen bullets; when a piercing cry was heard, and the figure of Clarence Harvey rushed from the right side of the gallery to the centre, across the line of fire of the guns.

"Clarence!" shouted General Langton, "good youth, stand back! I knew my man, I am not in their line of fire!"

"Oh, master—master!" sobbed Clarence, "it is my fault that I told you of this bad business!"

"This, your majesty, is the servant I told you of.

And now, after this fresh explosion on the part of your minister, does your majesty see the position? This earl, in a word, is compassing my murder, while striving to hoodwink your majesty into being an accomplice!"

"Send them away — send them away, Bridgeminster;" suddenly exclaimed the king, who was evidently becoming at once confused in mind and agitated in feeling. "Send them away. If he has dealt falsely with us, all the worse for him; if truly, we owe him compensation, which assuredly he shall receive, if he ever asks it."

And so, in great confusion, the assemblage broke up; and General Langton and Clarence Harvey were allowed to depart.

The whole of the next day the king spent with his ministers in secret council, as to how they were to deal with so portentous an incident.

The Earl of Bridgeminster again urged, and with some success, his belief that the insurrection was the true plot; and the assassination only a sham one, invented to divert their thoughts at a critical moment from the proper business of preparation.

Of course, under such circumstances, it became necessary to guard in both directions. And then arose some very delicate and subtle questions of policy.

Should the men denounced by General Langton be arrested at once ?

To that the king objected his royal word.

And to that one speaker after another annexed, in a whisper, the saving clause that, if necessary for the good of the State, his majesty must be kept in the dark while reasonable precautions were taken.

But this question was soon disposed of. All the ministers finally agreed that it would be absurd to interfere till the last moment, when they could at once test the-guilt of the supposed assassins, and arrest them, if guilty, at one fell swoop.

But how ?

To the astonishment of everybody the Earl of Bridgeminster said—

“ I advise that no change whatever be made in any—even the smallest—details ; that His Majesty, dressed as usual—goes as usual——”

The earl could not proceed, on account of the exclamations aroused by this extraordinary suggestion.

The king stared blankly at his favourite minister, as if wondering if his senses had deserted him.

“ Pardon me, your majesty, and you, noblemen and gentlemen, while I explain myself. Do you not perceive that, if the arrangements go on as I propose, the conspirators can have no doubt ? ”

“ That is plain enough ! ” said the monarch, drily.

“ Exactly, your majesty. They hear of the illus-

trious prey going, in perfect unconsciousness, hunting as before ; they see him leave the palace ; their prey, then, is secure—and what more can they want ? ”

“ It is wonderfully clear, my lord, and, to me, marvellously satisfactory ! ”

“ Then,” continued the earl, “ we will have an overwhelming force planted in ambush, guarding all possible inlets and outlets between the spot chosen and the rest of the world ; and so, at the critical moment, we wait for thunder-clap No. 1—the attack—and then for thunder-clap No. 2, the defence ; which will, I promise your majesty, wonderfully clear the air ! ”

“ And I am to take part in this pretty game of plot and underplot, am I ? ” asked the king, indignation and incredulity struggling together for mastery.

“ Yes, your majesty, only we shall have ourselves on this occasion to play the part of rebels, dethrone your majesty for the day, and the hour, and raise to the vacant place the most ambitious man among us—he who shall covet the honour of being your representative ! ”

There was a smile on every face at this explanation ; and then the same faces grew very sombre indeed at the thought that one of them was asked, perhaps seriously, to encounter one of the most perilous risks ever encountered by a loyal and adventurous subject.



## CHAPTER VI.

### PAINTING THE LILY.

GÉNÉRAL LANGTON is sitting in a miserable garret, where he has found temporary shelter with a friend of Clarence Harvey's—a friend of whose fidelity the latter is absolutely sure.

A long row of letters lies on the table, and the general is finishing the last of the series.

As he seals it, and puts it with the others, spread out to allow the addresses to dry, he says to his servant, whose face seems to be rapidly recovering its more natural and healthy hues—

“Clarence, you know what I am doing?”

“Yes.”

“And you have no fear for yourself?”

“None!”

“You persist, then, in sharing my danger in spite of my most earnest wishes that you should leave me, and not further compromise yourself?”

“I do.”

“And I, knowing of your relations with the Chief of the Secret Service Department, may still trust you?”

“How do you wish me to answer that?” asked

Clarence Harvey, earnestly. "How can I, one so little esteemed, *say* aught that you will care to hear?"

"I will tell you : explain why you feel this interest in me ; and that would be the exact assurance I should like to receive from you."

"Does General Langton really not know?" asked Clarence Harvey, reproachfully; and to the general's astonishment, he saw the tears gathering in the youth's eyes.

"I—I know? What do you mean—what can you mean?"

There was something in the youth's look and manner so inexplicable, that General Langton could not but gaze steadily in his face.

Then he rose, came to Clarence Harvey, put his two hands upon his shoulders and said—

"Have you deceived me? Are you other than what you seem? By heavens, it is so! That blush! A woman! Oh, Maria, there is no resisting the truth! More than once I had a faint suspicion, but saw, as I thought, facts that rendered the idea absurd. I know you now?"

Maria's face was indeed suffused with colour as she saw herself—and in that garb—at last recognised.

Presently she saw, or fancied she saw, a stern expression gathering over his countenance.

“Forgive me! forgive me! oh, my dear master, and I will tell you all. I love George Osborne. I could not bear to think of his hearing the story that you had to tell about me to his master and his master’s daughter. I determined to do something bold, dangerous, and to me not profitable, in the hope that he and you might at last—at last——”

Here Maria broke down into a passionate fit of weeping; and it was a long and sad task for General Langton to restore her to anything like spirit and confidence. And then, when she found he meant at once to send her away—perhaps back to the Mercer—she broke out into such wild and agitating appeals, that he was obliged to consent to let her preserve for a short time longer her incognito, and so go on to fulfil his errands.

“Clarence,” said he—“since I suppose I must still call you so—we must not deceive ourselves. I am about to undertake a business that I believe in my conscience is even more desperately dangerous than that which Sir George Charter is, I fear, still carrying on to such a lamentable end. But I do see just one faint chance—of saving these misguided men—and saving the cause at the same time.”

“Oh, master, is that indeed possible?”

“Listen. I think, then, that if I summon all the leading Jacobites to a meeting—including every man

of those whom I have had to denounce to the government—and if that meeting be fixed for the evening of the same day as the one chosen for the attack on the king, there seems some probability that these men may at least delay a week longer the execution of their project ; and come to me—if only to know why I summon them at so critical a time. They may fancy I have news to convey to them of a very important character affecting the chances of an insurrection, and which they might at all events as well know before committing themselves further ; they may even fancy I know something of the murder-plot, and want, in a friendly way, to let them have a hint. If they come, and I can persuade all those who there meet, to decide at once upon an insurrection—these men so devoted, so brave, may be carried away in a new and nobler strain of enthusiastic feeling and movement, and then let the very recollection of their own plot die out ; for I have the king's word they will not be touched, if they stop short in time. These letters therefore are to call together every man who has committed himself to me as a loyal and devoted subject of King James.”

“But will they come in obedience to a summons that they will understand is no longer for mere talk?” asked Clarence.

“They must ! They shall ! I have that in my hands which will compel them. But have you the courage

to say so, in delivering these letters, if they make any kind of excuses ? ”

“ What should I have to say ? ”

“ Nothing but this—*my master expects you.* ”

“ I understand. Trust me, master ! ”

“ Very good. Now go into that room, and you will find every requisite for once more so changing your personal appearance and dress, that not even our friend the Chief shall penetrate your disguise ! ”

Maria clapped her hands, then instantly relapsed into sobriety.

“ You do not mind forgetting for awhile your personal beauty, do you ? ”

“ What are you going to do with me ? ” asked Maria, inquisitively.

“ Make you into as ugly and old a hag as I possibly can. But never mind, Mistress Preston, Master George shall not see you ! ”

Maria blushed, and consented.

“ Go, put on the dress—then come to me, and I will give you the finishing touches ! ”

Maria obeyed, and returned in a few minutes the oddest picture possible. The incorrigible coquette had taken advantage of the circumstance in a truly characteristic way. Finding the dress consisted of the black, rusty, decayed weeds of some poor old widow, and conscious that her Clarence Harvey face would be just as unsuitable as her own for the future

representation, she had ridded herself of all the remaining stains on her face and neck, and restored her natural loveliness to its pristine power. What little she lost through the effects of the dyes used, was more than compensated for by the vivid blushes which covered her features as she returned to General Langton, conscious of that beauty, and of the fact that he, too, would be so.

He was indeed conscious. The laugh that first greeted such a grotesque apparition changed as he gazed; and his tongue began to speak about the absurd task he had undertaken of "painting the lily," till checked by a single thought—Hermia! Then the danger was gone. That powerful talisman saved him.

"So, Mistress Preston! you thought, I suppose, I should be obliged to ask myself whether I could bear to destroy such a piece of God's work, even for a short time? Eh?"

Maria laughed, and became more radiantly lovely than ever.

"Very well. Now look here!" General Langton produced two impromptu water-colour sketches. How Maria stared at them! She saw in an instant what they were—a portrait of herself as Clarence Harvey, and a copy of the same portrait, touched all over, so as to make the likeness change suddenly from twenty to sixty years of age! Every line,

every touch of shading was so skilfully made, that the second portrait became a working guide as to the alteration of the original face itself.

"You won't look so ugly, after all, you see!" said General Langton with a laugh. "That is my only regret. But come, we have no time to lose. Come, re-darken your pretty self into Clarence Harvey, and then I will try what I can do to turn you out artistically as Dame Gibson; a poor, old, decayed widow seeking help to go abroad to an only son, and bringing a letter of recommendation from a friend to each of the grand people you have to call on. Thus I think you will be likely to escape notice of the spies who haunt the neighbourhood of all the personages with whom I must now communicate."

"Shall I have no difficulty in obtaining admittance?" asked Clarence.

"Not the slightest. Say always to the servant 'your master expects me.' That will invariably compel him to go in with your message. That message will be understood; and then your only other message will be—apart from my letter—'My master expects you!' Smile off all explanations; and reply to the most urgent remonstrances, 'I assure you I have nothing in the world else to say than that MY MASTER WILL EXPECT YOU.'"

A couple of hours later the landlady of the house was greatly puzzled to know how that old woman

who went out of the house with a bag on her arm had got into it, and hurried upstairs to ask General Langton if she had stolen nothing.

The bag contained all the letters, carefully fastened up in the lining, while the bag itself revealed, on opening, nothing but the old lady's knitting-needles and worsted, with a stocking half made, her handkerchief, some broken biscuits, and a capital representation, in minor matters, of the heterogeneous contents of that wonderful receptacle—an old woman's pocket.



## CHAPTER VII.

### THE BLACK SATURDAY.

No sort of premonitory indication disturbed fashionable, commercial, or industrial London on the morning of the fateful Saturday that was to bring the king and the assassins into contact.

Rumours there had been, no doubt, of plots, for the air was never free from them. But on this particular morning, which was frosty, bright, exhilarating, when the snowdrops and crocuses were just beginning to make a show, men forgot politics and dynasties, and bustled about in keen enjoyment of the healthful, blood-stirring season.

Among these came a poorly-clad labourer, carrying an empty hod, as if out of work and seeking a job; who stopped near one of the sentries of Kensington Palace, and said—

“Fine day for the king’s hunting; but a deal too cold, I guess, for him to venture out!”

“He’s going for all that,” said the sentry, and the labourer passed on.

There was nothing remarkable in the incident so

far; but what was remarkable was the fact that the same labourer presently stopped near another sentinel—who was out of sight of the first—and put the same question to that man. He got a similar answer, and walked away.

On reaching one of the thick bits of shrubbery he glided in among the trees, and was concealed. When he emerged he was in the dress of a gentleman, and the hod was left behind.

He goes to the Palace stables and yard and finds them full of bustle. As a loyal gentleman he watches with great interest all the doings of the day. The old lumbering, heavy, and gilded state-coach is standing ready; six superb but over-fed greys are harnessed to it, each led by a groom. Horsemen, many in number, are also collected here, intending evidently to accompany the king. Still he lingers on, so that doubt as to the king's intentions shall be impossible.

At a given signal he sees the equipage led away to the principal entrance, where it waits for the king. The horsemen and other carriages draw up in orderly lines in the rear. A squadron of horse now dash on to the ground, and the loyal gentleman hurries off.

He is scarcely out of sight of the palace before he enters a humble workman's lodging.

The door is instantly closed and locked after him

by an aged woman, who looks terribly frightened as she recognises him, and addresses him as "your worship."

"Where is the pigeon?" he demands.

"In the upper room."

"Keep watch here. Cough if anything alarms you."

He left her and went up-stairs.

A basket cage was on the table; inside the cage a carrier-pigeon of remarkable beauty, and still more remarkable power of swift and certain flight.

He sat down and wrote in his note-book these words—

"All is well. The man keeps the appointment he never made. The moment of departure was 11 o'clock. From this all other calculations may be timed. All well; very well."

He reads and re-reads this; then tears out the leaf, folds it up, and secures it by a silken ribbon under the wing of the beautiful bird, whose bright eyes glance sideways at him, as if in full understanding of all that was expected from it.

Then, holding the bird in his hands he goes to the window, lifts the sash with his left hand, while holding the pigeon against his breast with the right, looks out very carefully for nearly a minute to see that no special danger threatened the messenger, and then lets it loose.

Away flies the bird.

The loyal gentleman watches for some time its spiral circling motions anxiously, as if dreading a mischievous shot before it was out of reach ; but no, the bird is gone straight through the upper air to its destined place.

Over Chiswick the bird pauses, seeking for its proper place of descent.

The master sees it while too far off to make it hear his whistle.

It descends. He whistles. The bird hears, and flies lovingly to seek his breast.

At the moment a bright flame is seen, then a noise heard, and the poor bird drops dead among the very men in whose cause it has been engaged ; one of whom in his fear it might go past, or in his impatience to learn what it had to tell, had fired the shot.

And then, while rough hands untie the silken fastenings, and read the all-important missive, the owner of the bird, a tender-hearted conspirator, rushes about among them, frantic with the loss of his beloved pigeon, which he denounces as an unmitigated murder.

The word strikes on many ears, and more than one voice echoes the voice of him who says loudly—

“ A bad omen, to begin with killing our friends ! ”

“ Not at all ! ”. cries another, “ provided we end by killing the worst of our enemies.”

The voice was Sir George Charter's; and in a moment later, the conspirators were in active movement; satisfied the prey was within their grasp, and not one of them apparently thinking of General Langton and his demand they should meet him that evening.

The labourer, alias the loyal gentleman on foot, re-appeared at the palace as a loyal gentleman on horseback only a short time after the despatch of the pigeon.

He had gone some distance along a by-road toward Chiswick, meaning to overtake the royal party, before he learned, and to his very considerable surprise and discomposure as he emerged into the high road, that the king had not yet passed. In an instant he turned—went all the way back to the palace, seeing nothing of the royal procession, and re-entered the palace precincts, where he thought he saw signs of commotion among the horsemen assembled there.

After a while, he ventured a question—

“What time will the king get back, do you think to the water on the other side, for I should like to get a peep at His Majesty?”

“Well, to whisper you a bit of a secret the king ain't going after all.”

“Indeed! How is that?”

"I haven't the least notion; unless that His Majesty has done this sort of thing so often, as to make it wearisome and fancy a change even at the last hour."

"Of course, of course! and very right too; it must be tedious. I thought of waiting for his return when he wouldn't have so many grand people about him, and one might have hoped for a look or a smile; but, as I am disappointed in that, it's no use my going further. I wish you a very good morning."

"Good morning, sir."

Our loyal horseman draws off, as if reluctantly, from the throng, then puts his horse into a pleasant canter for a minute or so, then into a sharp trot; then, after a cautious look behind him, he buries his spurs in the sides of the poor horse, and is borne along at a terrific pace, as if the rider had lost all control. But the very instant the frightened and panting animal begins to slacken speed, the spurs are once more at their cruel work.

"On, on, on!" is the low cry of the horseman to his steed, broken by an abrupt, occasional sentence, such as this—

"What is it? Discovery? Ruin? Or only accident? God only knows!"

He soon reaches Chiswick by a circuitous route,

and leaping his horse over a low enclosure rather than give time for the opening of a gate, he dismounts, leaving his horse unattended, rushes into a doorway and up the narrow winding stairs, into a room where Sir George Charter and the chiefs of the assassination plot are assembled.

What a picture it would have been, could artist have given us the looks of those men as they met the look of the new comer, and saw the alarm and horror in his face.

"They know! They must! The king won't stir!"

"Calm yourself," said Sir George, "and let us know, too, what they know."

"The king, I have just learned, is not intending to hunt at all to-day, so that the scheme is clear—we are all to be assembled here waiting for him, and just as we are preparing to strike, we shall ourselves be caught like rats in a cock-pit, and slaughtered like rats, unless they prefer keeping us for the scaffold!"

A dead—an awful silence, for a few seconds pervaded the room, as men weighed carefully the precise value of this most alarming news. Then their excitement broke out; and for another few minutes there was nothing but clamour, and wild exclamations, and still wilder suggestions of all sorts of impossible schemes.

"Gentlemen!" cried Sir George Charter. Then

finding the buzz still continuing, he repeated, in sterner accents, and loudly, "Gentlemen! will you listen, or shall I fire a pistol-shot among you, to make you?"

The only answer he received was that several of the conspirators went at once to seek their horses; and their defection led to a general flight. All saw the time had come, when nothing remained but for each to look to his own safety. Sir George in terrible silence, saw them depart till he was left alone. Then only, he too mounted and fled.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### A LAST APPEAL.

MARIA's work has been well done. She has passed from one Jacobite to another the signal for meeting; has resisted, almost with malicious enjoyment, every attempt made to persuade, to terrify, or to bribe her into saying she had "not been able to find" the worthy gentleman in question; or that he was so watched that the cause would be injured if he stirred hand or foot; to these and similar appeals she had ever the same ready answer, "My master expects you!" and away the seeming old crone went, tarrying no further question.

Some of the more cowardly ones of the party did still hang back, but the great majority came to the appointment, and there they waited General Langton's arrival.

These were all conspirators in the insurrection plot, but knowing nothing of the fearful murder plot that had just come to a crisis. The members of the last have not yet had time even if they have the inclination to attend.

The place of meeting was a miller's, on the edge of a little creek running into the Thames, near Wandsworth. There was still to be seen one of the latest London examples of the windmill, with green sward all about it, like a bit of country still lingering in the precincts of the great town; and the miller himself, though a stern and fanatical adherent to James, had enjoyed the singular good fortune to be quite unsuspected by the authorities: hence the choice of his house now.

A boat lay in the creek, and tradition has it that more than once a very singular phenomenon has been seen to take place in connection with that boat. The miller has been seen to put into the boat say half-a-dozen sacks of flour to take over to the other side of the Thames; five have been disposed of in due course of transit for London, but as to the sixth, the miller's man (an uncommonly stupid man, and addicted to drink) has again and again been known to swear he never saw any more of the sack, except in the shape of an empty bag; which was always on such occasions lying at the bottom of the boat on the return. So sure as he was busy getting out these sacks at the door of the public-house on the other side, so sure was he to find the inside of one of the sacks had walked off, without saying, as he observed, "with your leave, or by your leave."

But if the miller himself was not troubled about the matter, why should the man be? particularly as, when he did once speak to the miller about it, he was told to mind his own business, and not make a fool of himself, or walk off!

And thus, at critical seasons, had many a man been able, almost at the last hour, to draw his neck from the noose that hung out for him, by getting to the friendly miller, lying quietly for a day or two in the top of the mill, then getting across the Thames in a sack, with a ring of other sacks standing all about him to keep off eyes and hands.

The miller's house, an old fashioned one, the remains of what had been a superb manor house in the Tudor style, was only a short distance from the mill; and there came to it from near and far some thirty Jacobites, all men of substance, and local power, to obey General Langton's call.

Beginning with the first darkness of night, the miller—having sent away all his people on one pretence and another—took his boat across the great river, and waited at the mouth of a solitary lane.

Not for long. One dark figure came forth, gave the signal, "Now if ever!" shook hands, and silently got into the boat.

Then the two waited. Presently two other figures came up at the same moment from different directions, paused, peered suspiciously at each other

through the darkness; then one of them tried an experiment, saying—

“Now if ——”

“Now if ever, brave boy!” ejaculated the relieved Jacobite, and these also descended to the boat.

Others followed; the boat was soon filled; and then, with muffled oars, the miller and one of the Jacobites rowed the boat over, to return and return again till the whole were assembled.

By this expedient the miller’s own neighbours, scattered about further inland, were ingeniously kept in the dark, utterly unsuspecting.

When, after a long delay, no fresh persons appeared, the boat ceased its passages.

A dark, agitated, stormy meeting now began in the bay-windowed room of the old manor house.

“Where is our summoner?” is the cry, again and again repeated; and in tones and with accents that imply that the evil “spirits” of which Hotspur spake, have for once consented to come from the “vasty deep” at General Langton’s call, but only to rend him for his audacity.

The miller, an imperturbable man, goes in and out, bringing beer, and bread and cheese, the only “cheer” he can offer them; and the Jacobites, in spite of the furious passions that possess them, manage to do justice to these simple refreshments.

While he is away from the room on one of these

errands—for the Jacobites are terribly thirsty—the miller puts down his can, goes to a door, opens it, and listens. Presently he coughs—the very gentlest of coughs—and steps descend the staircase, and General Langton comes into the passage where the miller is.

“Are you satisfied?” asked the miller.

“Of what?” asked the General.

“That these men do not mean fighting for King James, but may mean murder of King James’s noblest adherent?”

“If you mean me, by this extravagant praise, I can only say, my friend, I have within the last few months seen and heard too many roaring lions in my path to heed the monsters much now.

“Besides, what’s my life worth if I can do nothing? Come, come, my dear, brave, honest friend, you are one true man: why should we doubt there are others as good as you and I?”

“Then you will venture among them?”

“Ay, if the Evil One himself stands at the door as their sentinel!”

“Then, hark ye! Look through the window in the direction of my finger. There, about four or five hundred yards off is another and smaller creek, almost hidden by the willows that have grown on both banks. A person not knowing of its existence, or only seeing it from the river, would have no sus-

picion, on coming to it from the land, that it was other than some drain or watercourse dangerous to heedless feet. There I have for a long time kept, in view of contingencies, another boat—one supposed by my neighbours to have been sold off long ago and got rid of. The oars are in it. The fastening is merely a loop of rope passed over the head of a great stake, and can be slipped off in a moment. Let me see. How are you to find it in a hurry and in the darkness? I could myself go blindfold to it. Oh, I know! Standing at either of my doors, at night, there is a distant light—what light I know not—always burning, I have noticed, in the exact direction of the creek, but far beyond it, on the Chelsea bank. Should you, in your hurry, slip down the bank, never mind; there's a hard ledge before you reach the water; and you've only to put out your hand, stoop down, and move to and fro, and you must come upon the boat."

"Thanks, thanks! But, my dear fellow, when I resolved to come here, I resolved to come in the spirit of the old Roman who burnt all the boats behind him. However, I thank you heartily. Let us go in."

And thus did General Langton deal with the results of the miller's considerate forethought, who had placed his noble guest on an upper floor in a position to hear—up the very broad, open chimney—the

conversation and the tone of the conspirators he had summoned before going in among them.

At this moment the miller was called away to fetch some fresh Jacobites from the other side. When he returned with them, it was as if he had brought all the fiercest passions of human nature into sudden and fearful play, throughout the assembly, as they listened to the story told by the new comers—of the news that had set all London in an uproar—the failure of Sir George's secret plot; General Langton's visit as informer to the King; the arrest of several of the chief men concerned in it; and at last—of the acknowledgment that the very men who brought the news had been sharers in the scheme.

To an assembly called together, unwillingly, to consult about one of the most hazardous of operations, and then suddenly plunged into a new abyss, what man could hope successfully to address himself as an advocate for Civil War? Yet these were the men General Langton had compelled to come there, and pledged himself to meet, and whom he must address instantly, if any good were to be done; and a universal flight for safety arrested.

But it was soon decided, amid a roar of execration, that no man would see him there that day; nor ever again, except as in the enjoyment of the reward of his infamous treachery.

"So, Netherstone," said one of the Jacobites, as the miller re-entered, "your promised patriot does not come. He, like Falstaff, I suppose, has learned, by this, that discretion is the better part of valour!"

"No, my friend," said General Langton, entering, while the whole of the Jacobites sprang up in agitation to meet him. "No, my friend; you see that is just the lesson I have not learned. I AM HERE!"

"Then," sneered another Jacobite, "it may not be amiss, before we go, to teach that lesson to his lordship."

"I need, I am sure, all the instruction that you, my Lord Stanbury, and these other friends, can give me; and again I say, I am here—to learn if you will; but, in any case, HERE!"

The dignity and sternness with which this was said imposed a momentary silence on all.

General Langton saw—and hastened to seize his advantage.

"You are angry, friends."

"Angry!" scornfully echoed Lord Stanbury. "Angry! We angry! What have we to be angry about? Our best men are in prison, and on their way, no doubt, to the scaffold; or, like myself, obliged to find shelter from the bloodhounds of this infamous government! Our cause is hopelessly ruined! But, what then? Does not all the world—except, perhaps the miserable Jacobite part of it, of



which your lordship need not think—does not all the world know how grandly General Langton has ruined his king, betrayed his companions, and glorified himself? I only wonder, my lord, you do not hurry to King William, and take shelter in the royal arms that must be waiting to receive you!”

Stern hums of assent on all sides showed how perfectly Lord Stanbury expressed the feeling of the conspirators at the General's late behaviour.

“Oh, my lord, and you, brother Jacobites, all around me—oh, but you are brave and chivalrous thus to address one man among a host! But,” responded the General, “I will test you—you, my Lord Stanbury, and see whether or no honour has passed away from the councils of Jacobite gentlemen. You, my lord, knew of this intended assassination—you aided it. With you I have no more to do. But what I have to ask is, Are there here other gentlemen—not one, or two, or three, but the bulk of you—are these, I ask, as a body, prepared to assert that this was the right path for the whole party to pursue? If you think so, say so! But do not be so unmanly as to blame me for feeling what in my inmost soul I believe you all feel; at least all of you who have not aided and abetted this most foul enterprise.”

It was a terrible question to put. Many of the

persons present did think the assassination scheme a dangerous, immoral one; but having been compelled to come to this meeting, they were glad to avail themselves of the wide-spread irritation against General Langton, for what certainly was treachery, if not something truly noble.

But others beside Lord Stanbury were present who were down on the king's black list of his intended murderers; and these did their best to feed the general excitement and rage.

Drawing their swords, they raised the cry—

“No more talk! Down with the traitor! Blood for blood! Who knows but he'll be giving evidence against our men soon?”

These and similar cries were raised; but there were noblemen and gentlemen present not prepared for such extremities. They had come—most unwillingly, but still they had come—to learn what chances there were for the completion of General Langton's scheme, by an early insurrection.

The interposition of these persons saved the meeting from further violence for the moment. And the General used the calm to say to them—

“My lords and gentlemen, thanking you in our king's name for your presence here to-day——”

“In the king's name? Pooh!” contemptuously interjected Lord Stanbury.

General Langton paused, but thought it better to ignore the insult, and went on with his speech, as if no interruption had occurred—

“Thanking you in His Majesty’s name for your presence, amid so many dangers, I ask from you a candid consideration of the position. A great crime has been attempted, but happily failed. Providence has enabled one of yourselves—a Jacobite—avowing himself a Jacobite—to be the instrument in warding off that terrible danger to our cause. Need I tell you that, had any but a Jacobite done this thing, which stirs so deeply Lord Stanbury’s anger, further progress would have been impossible on account of the infamy that, like a funeral pall, would have overspread our cause, in token of death.”

“Progress ! it is impossible !” exclaimed several voices.

“I deny that !” impetuously returned General Langton. “I say this incident does not redound to my personal credit—God forbid !—but to the credit of the cause. Our honour as a great party—the party of the nation—is re-habilitated ! What else ? Why, two things, that on the one hand the Government thinks all danger past ; while, on the other, we know that our secret arsenals are untouched, unknown ; that the French king waits to give you succour ; that a hundred thousand Jacobites are ready to

spring forth in obedience to your call, if you will but give it. To arms, then! To arms! To arms!"

This was said with such fire and electrical power of sympathy, that in an instant a dozen swords were out and pointed on high, flashing in the rays of the candles; and the wearers re-echoed the appeal, in a tremendous shout—

"To arms! To arms!"

"Hush! hush!" said the miller. "Although we are not within hearing of any other house, and though this is no place for passers-by, it is impossible to say when, how, or where the bloodhounds are watching for us!"

These dozen enthusiastic spirits soon saw, however, they were but a dozen among thirty.

They saw also that some of the most influential of the Jacobites were outside the dozen; and then they saw the failure of the whole scheme.

Not so General Langton—at least, if he feared it, he acted on quite the other assumption. Addressing by name one of the most important of the silent spectators, a nobleman of the highest rank and unbounded wealth, he said—

"Let us now, my lord, clearly understand each other. This is my last appeal. You understand that? It means it is the last appeal of your grey-haired, unhappy, disrowned sovereign, to give him

his own again. Do you understand that, my lord?"

"Why do you address yourself to me?" fiercely asked the nobleman thus spoken to.

"Because you are marked out by heaven—by the past bounty of royalty—by your own faith—by your present possessions—by everything that ought to stir a man of heart, of soul, of loyal worth and breeding, to lead all these hesitating men. Come, come, my lord! your sword is a bright one, is unstained—let us see it. Let it flash before us like the beacon light that led the Israelites through the desert. This is our desert. Be you our leader. I willingly place myself under you—will guarantee to be guided by you—ay, in all things, apart from mere military and technical knowledge, for you are brave, you are experienced, you are a statesman. Come, then, come! Give me the delight to hear you this time re-echo my cry, 'To arms!'"

All gazed on the nobleman, whose colour came and went, whose glance shifted uneasily to and fro, whose soul was clearly at the moment wavering between the instinct of prudence and the instinct of patriotism (from his side of the question); but prudence prevailed—the hand did not touch the sword-hilt, the lips did not respond to the animated earl.

"Then I take back with me to the king the statement—'Sire, I called these men, I showed them all was ready, and they shrank back, faint of heart.'" The answer came in fierce cries of,—

"Stab him! Run the braggart through! If he leaves here scot free he'll be at the Secretary's Office in an hour, and give in a new list!"

The conspirators became now a mere mob; those nearest General Langton making faint efforts to keep back the fiercer spirits behind.

"You see my sword?" said General Langton. "It hangs by my side. There it shall hang. Do your pleasure—I wait to see how my brother Jacobites treat one who is honest to the heart's core, and who fears them not."

He folded his arms, and stood looking calmly around, his face pallid, but free from any signs of terror. He had long ago drained in thought the cup of death that these men might offer him; and he felt he could die now, and that on the whole, it was perhaps desirable.

The mob behind forced its way nearer, amid a score of vehement and, for the most part, unintelligible cries. They hustled him, they evidently wanted to strike, and yet each arm fell paralysed by some unknown power—whether of conscience or what they knew not.

Suddenly one of the noisiest made a lunge at him

under the arm of the miller, who was in a quiet way standing between Lord Langton and his most dangerous enemies.

The miller saw, and half anticipated the murderous act, by a blow in the face that would have done credit to one of the most distinguished pugilists of the day.

The blow was just in time. General Langton felt the prick, but felt also it was harmless; but the striker, on feeling the miller's fist, did not find that harmless. The blood spouted forth. The gentleman—a fox-hunting country squire—became sick, and for a moment a complete diversion was made.

Seeing all was over, that nothing could stir these men to another trial, which yet in their hearts he knew they yearned to make, if only they could do it with obvious safety, he moved to go away, covered by the friendly bulk of the miller's person.

It was a dangerous movement. By his boldness and fidelity to the mission he had undertaken, he had now made enemies of the only men in the assembly who could have been favourable to him—those not implicated in the murder.

They were all now—with only the exception perhaps of some of those whom his eloquence had momentarily stirred—alike hostile to him. The murder-conspirators hated him for the destruction of their plot. The nobler insurrection-conspirators

hated him for shaming them by his own bold acts, and by his indignant comments on their pitiful ones.

Accordingly, just when the miller was getting certain in his own mind that General Langton would never be permitted to leave the place alive, a sinister voice from among the dense mass of pushing, gesticulating, sword-displaying Jacobites called out—

“Understand, gentlemen, he will be a fool now if he does not go to the king and make the best of it! If he is obliged to give up his own plot do you suppose he’ll be such an idiot as not then to go over to the usurper, and take our lives and properties in his hand? Ask him? Ask him whether he means, under any and all circumstances, to pledge himself to stay in exile, and act the devoted, heroic, martyr-like sort of game he suggests! Ask him!”

“I tell you frankly, without waiting for anybody to ask me, what I mean to do. I shall go from here to St. Germain, to our king, and then——”

“Ay, then?” demanded many voices, noticing his pause.

“Then,” said General Langton, with just a slight flushing of his cheek—“I reserve to myself the question of the future.”

“Did I not say so? He warns you fairly. Who will join me to punish this loud-mouthed traitor?”

And then, in the rush that ensued, the bloody



business would have been consummated, but for the appearance, on the top of the stairs outside, of the figure of Clarence Harvey ; who, open-mouthed, his face as white as the miller's flour, tried to speak calmly, but was in such agitation as to find it difficult to speak at all—

“ There are men all about crouching in the darkness ! ”

What a stop, what a lull in that tumultuous assembly followed these words ! Swords dropped, and countenances dropped lower even than the swords.

Again came that sinister voice—

“ Is not this what the traitor Langton brought us here for ? ”

A yell rather than a cry arose—a yell of vengeance, even in the very teeth of their own danger.

“ Defend yourself now ! ” shouted the miller ; “ friends will help you.”

As he spoke he snatched a sword from one of the angry Jacobites, and confronted the mob.

Clarence Harvey made a second.

And then three other Jacobites, who were too just or too generous to see such a barbarous act committed as they saw inevitable unless protection were instantly afforded, joined them ; and, at that sight, General Langton, with a sigh of regret, drew his own blade and started to the front.

The aspect of the swordsmen compelled a parley. The General held up his hand to speak.

"No, no! down with him! he has blarneyed us long enough!"

Such were the cries that met him; but he managed to silence them by his first few words.

"My friend the miller has placed safety in my hands. Take it. There is a boat in an unknown creek—he will show you the way. Fill the boat with as many as can get in; let others wade through the water or hold on by the edge. Quick! away! I pledge my honour to you that if you can reach that spot you have a good chance to escape; only move in the silence of death, or death itself awaits you!"

In two minutes the room would have been clear of all but General Langton and Clarence Harvey, but the king's constables and soldiers were too quick for them.

While the Jacobites were fast struggling with each other to get through a narrow doorway pointed out by the miller, who went in advance, the points of bayonets were seen rising up the staircase, borne by a dense mass of men who moved in terrible silence.

"Away! away!" shouted General Langton. "We will keep them at bay for a minute or two!"

In a frenzy of alarm, the fugitive Jacobites did

their best to escape ; but their hurry was so great as to make them impede each other.

General Langton, Clarence Harvey, the miller, and his three new and faithful friends, now barred the road with levelled swords.

"Yield yourselves !" said a stern voice.

"Why ? " asked General Langton, who was hoping to achieve a brief delay without bloodshed.

"We summon you as rebels. Drop your swords, or we shall advance through your bodies !"

"I am no rebel ! And if I were, I have just done your king a timely service, that he ought not thus to repay !"

"You are General Lord Langton ?"

"I am."

"You are my prisoner."

"And these innocent persons—my servant, and the miller, who thought it was a convivial meeting ; and these three friends, who are as innocent of rebellion as——"

"As yourself !" sneered the chief officer.

"Exactly !" said the general.

"And where are the others ? " asked the officer.

"But I need not ask *you*. Our men outside are, doubtless, dealing with them !"

"I yield, then ; and beg, in the miller's name, to invite you inside."

Then, moving rapidly back into the room, he went

toward the table, intending to pass it, and in so doing caught a glimpse of a paper. It was the list of all the persons present at the meeting!

The head of the police saw the paper at the same moment, and ran forward to seize it; but Lord Langton ran him through the sword arm, and then, snatching at the paper with his left hand, kept the rest of the men at bay, while he put the paper to a candle and lighted it.

There was a movement forward of another armed officer, leading on the men with levelled bayonets to stop him, and he instantly fell, pierced to the heart.

"Gently, gentlemen!" said General Langton. "This is painful work. I seek not to protect myself. Give me a moment, then. Nay, sir, if you will have it——" and a second man dropped, while the others were paralysed to see the fate of their comrades, as the fateful document was being burnt. Of course, they could have easily overpowered him with the rush of bayonets; but they seemed to be acting under an order not to kill, but to take prisoner—doubtless on account of the government's desire to learn at the fountain-head all the particulars of the second conspiracy.

And then, with a single sweep of his sword, the general cut through both the candles, and left the room in darkness, as he shouted—

"Quick, my friends ! Escape, while they cut each other's throats at their leisure !"

He moved, in the dark, to an open window in a far corner, which he had previously looked at, and was about to leap out, when he was caught by a strong hand, and he heard a stern voice whisper, amid the great confusion of the place—

"Where is *she* — your abandoned associate ? Speak, or you die ! Tell me—and you escape !"

"Noel !" whispered Clarence, "let him go, or *you* die. I am here !"

Noel did let go, and stretched out his hand to catch Clarence, and was successful.

"Noel ! by heaven I'll stab you, if you stop me !"

"You break faith with me, do you ? I thought so, or I would not have so completely changed sides to be revenged on you. But speak."

"Noel, you rush on your fate. I don't want to kill you—no, no ; and I don't want to be killed. But it is one of us now, if you don't release me."

The unseen struggle continued for a moment longer ; then Clarence Harvey leaped from the window, and Noel lay bathed in his blood on the floor, crying out to the men who were trampling on him that he was one of themselves—their guide.

## CHAPTER IX.

### FRIGHTENED LONDON.

THE terror, the excitement, the confusion through London was something awful when the news began to circulate like wild-fire through the streets and the public places; first of the attempt on the king's life, and then of the proposed attempt at civil war.

The wildest, most absurd rumours found ready credence.

"The king was killed," insisted one authority.

"No, he was only wounded," asserted another.

A third, who declared the king had not been at the place at all, was only laughed at for his ignorance and credulity.

But it soon became known that all the leading men of the murder-plot were in the hands of the government, except Sir George Charter; while arrests of known or suspected Jacobites continued to be made in every direction.

The Lord Mayor hastily summoned the Common Council and the Court of Aldermen; and as he, at least, must know what had happened, the members

lost no time in drawing together to satisfy their curiosity, and take part in the requisite measures for ensuring the common safety. Of course Sir Richard Constable was among them, keeping a bold front but trembling for his own safety.

The train bands were presently seen marching through the streets; the Mercer and George taking care to be in their places among them.

Next day the king went in state to parliament and told his loving subjects that, but for a gracious providence, he must at that moment have been a corpse.

A thrill of horror ran through the whole country. Jacobites and Williamites, alike exclaimed against the meditated atrocity; though it must be confessed the Jacobites had it often thrown in their teeth, that their indignation was convenient.

The Habeas Corpus Act was suspended, and a new and grand association instantly formed, and an instrument drawn up, by which the people's representatives solemnly recognised King William as their only and lawful king; bound themselves to defend him against James and James's adherents; and solemnly swore that if the king's life was shortened by violence, they would avenge him upon his murderers.

The members of the House were all summoned, and every name called over, and then they all,

county by county, went up and appended their signatures.

Rewards of a thousand pounds were offered for the capture of each of the conspirators who had escaped. People in every direction hunted out the presumed assassins as though they had been wild beasts. The gates of the city of London were closed for many hours, in order to assist in the search. Armed men occupied the highways, and stopped every doubtful passer. And in these and a hundred other ways did the English people show their abhorrence of the unmanly crime of assassination.

A fortnight has elapsed. The public mind has quieted down; business, politics, pleasure, and necessity are all again asserting their claims, and pushing the remembrance of the late attempt out of mind.

The fact that no actual insurrection has followed the abortive attempt to murder, has also had a very happy effect. All the precautions of government during the last few days had pointed to some sort of expectation of an outbreak.

But that fear also dies out. Men breathe again in comfort; England is itself once more; and beginning to look forward with a kind of half pleasurable excitement to the details of the forth-



coming trials, and the executions that are sure to follow.

Meantime, General Viscount Langton's name is in every one's mouth—in connection with his double action—the one saving the king's life, the other his overt and desperate attempt to assail the dynasty ; and in consequence, a renewed proclamation specially against him ; and renewed efforts to capture him, made with all the resources of the government, and with all the intensity of feeling which the Earl of Bridgeminster could infuse into the search.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE WEAVER'S GARRET.

Now it happened one night, when the Mercers household at Blackheath were all in bed, that a messenger arrived, and stood demanding, with great vehemence, to see George Osborne; whom he had been seeking at the house on the Bridge, but had been there informed that the apprentice was at Blackheath on business with Sir Richard.

He shouted, rang, and thumped, till both the Mercer and George had risen from their beds to see what the disturbance was about.

"What now?" cried Sir Richard, from the stair-head; but there was such a noise between the indignant servants and persistent visitor that his voice was not heard.

"Oh, sir—oh, dear father, will you not go down and see? Perhaps 'tis *he* in danger—pursued—who knows?"

"Teena!"

She had risen, and flown along the passage in her scarlet cloak and hood, her face white as a ghost's.

"Go, dear father, or let me. I am sure it is General Langton, or some messenger from him. George, will you not go?"

"Gently, George—mind who you let in," cried Sir Richard, as George ran down. "Devil a Jacobite shall shelter here. Plague take the whole tribe, I say—king and all. I know they'll bring us to the Tower yet."

"Hush, father—listen! 'Tis not his voice, I think."

"Why, the child trembles like a leaf," said Sir Richard, supporting her as he leaned over the balustrade. "Ho, George! who is it beating the devil's tattoo on my door, in the dead of a dark night like this—eh? Make those fellows stop their confounded bawling—I can't hear a word."

"It's a Spitalfields weaver, sir," shouted George.

"And what the deuce has he spun himself here for?"

"There's a man wounded at his house wants to see me."

"Oh, father, father, listen!"

"Hush, child. Wants you, George? Why, you are not a doctor."

"Can't you be a little quicker than this for a dying man?" cried the weaver, gruffly.

"My poor, mad fellow, do you take us for a house full of priests?" responded the knight.

"Or corpses," muttered the man. "You are as much trouble to wake!"

"Who is the man—do you know his name?" asked George.

"Yes; Gervase Noel. But look here," said the weaver, laying a pallid hand on George's chest, "are you a Jacobite?"

"No," answered George.

"What do you mean, you rogue?" roared Sir Richard. "How dare you ask such a question here?"

"You aint," said the weaver, fixing his eyes on the apprentice; "no more am I. I'd be ruined if I was suspected of harbouring 'em; and I've a family of eight. I wouldn't harbour one if he offered me a fortune. I wouldn't harbour one if he threatened to burn my house down. But to-night this chap comes to the door and drops. I knew him directly; there's a reward out for him and a description. If I'd met him in any other way, I should have gone and give him up and got the money; but when he comes to the door and looks in and drops, I was done. I couldn't step over his body to go and tell of him. I was done—done out of the reward, my rightful reward—done into lugging him up and hiding him—done into feeding him with the children's food—done into running here for you. Hang it!" finished the

weaver, wiping his streaming brows, "it's my usual luck. I'm always done, somehow."

"Ah, me—no! God will set all right for you in the end!" said Christina, who had descended the stairs with Sir Richard. She laid her hand on the man's arm. "Heaven bless and keep you; and may you never have worse luck, good friend, than this kind act shall bring you and yours, if I live till to-morrow."

"My friend," said Sir Richard, "you have given us a lesson in hospitality. Come and profit by it. Summers, bring some wine."

While the poor weaver refreshed himself, George ran up-stairs and made ready to accompany him back to Spitalfields.

"Take my sword, George," said Sir Richard, when he came down.

"Nay, it may get your name mixed up in the affair."

"So may you, so may the disturbance to night; but we are done into it, as our friend says. Now, off with you, and have your eyes on both sides the road at once for highwaymen or footpads."

The wounded man lay in a room at the top of a house near Spitalfields Square. George and his guide passed through a fishmonger's shop and up four flights of crazy stairs to get to him.

The room was in darkness till the weaver struck a light and forced a candle into a crack of the table.

Then George saw the face of the sick man. It was quite strange to him: a dark face with long black lashes to the closed eyes, and finely-shaped marble-like lids, whose expression of peace contrasted strangely with the look of passion and melancholy on the thin, small mouth. George thought him asleep.

While they stood, however, looking at him, he said, without opening his eyes—

"Is that you, my kind friend? Did you find the man?"

"I have brought him that calls himself George Osborne, Mercer's apprentice, and there he stands," said the weaver; "but he says he knows not your name nor you."

"He is here on the left, is he not?"

"Yes," answered George, kindly laying his hand on the sick man's shoulder; "I am here, Gervase Noel."

The still face winced.

"Master weaver," said the feeble voice, "tell him to take his hand off me. He must keep near, because I can't speak loud; but let him not touch me again."

"Well, you *are* the queerish fish!" said the

weaver; "after my going all the way to Blackheath for this gentleman, that's the way you treat him!"

"I am not afraid of him; I should like to be alone with him, if you would not mind."

"Not I," said the weaver; then added to George, "I know a barber-surgeon round by the market as I think would come and look at him in a friendly way, being a little in his line himself. I'll run round and fetch him."

"Has your wound not been attended to?" asked George, when they were alone.

"It wants no attention; it will not trouble me long. Are you near enough to hear me?"

"I hear you quite well."

"I'm afraid I don't speak humbly enough for a man who asks a great—a very great favour."

George was perplexed and silent.

"You are there, still?"

"Yes."

"And hear me?"

"Quite plainly."

"I have a wife."

"I understand," said George; "you want her brought here?"

"A wife," repeated Noel, faintly.

"You want to see her?"

For the first time since George came in, the sick man opened his large dark eyes, and fixed them on

his face. The sight seemed to make him forget what he had intended to say, for he continued to gaze at it with a look of passionate revulsion, which agitated George strangely, he could not tell why.

"Come," said he, thinking the man's mind was failing; "you were going to tell me how I could find your wife, was not that it? Do you think I could bring her?"

The dark eyes slowly filled, the damp hand clutched George's sleeve.

"Bring her—bring her to me! that's all I ask. She struck the blow that kills me, but tell her one sight of her before I die will—will——"

"Hush! Pray quiet yourself," said George.

"Bring her!" cried Noel, grasping George's arm more tightly, and drawing himself up near him till the passionate lips almost touched his ear. "Bring her here before my eyes—bring her, and with my breath I will bless you—*you*, her lover—you, who I know can find her, curse you!"

He fell back and hid his face from George with helpless loathing.

While George sat mute, feeling convinced the poor Jacobite was raving, Noel looked up and said, very quietly and patiently—

"I beg your pardon; I forgot myself—forgot my helplessness, forgot that it is on you I depend for the last—last bit of comfort of my life. Sir, I



believe my wife kept all this from you; I believe it possible that you may be ignorant of whom I speak."

"Assuredly I am," said George.

Noel hesitated a moment, then gave a short, strange laugh.

"I don't know," said he, in a voice so bitter it made George's blood curdle, "I don't know exactly whether a husband is expected to study the feelings of his wife's lover, and try to soften the blow when he has to break the news to him that she *has* a husband. Perhaps the best way will be for you to look at something you will find in a pocket-book in that corner, if it please you, among my clothes there. Ay, you'll find it in the coat lappet."

George, kneeling on one knee, took out the pocket-book, and gave it to Noel.

Noel's trembling, clammy fingers gave him back a folded paper; and then, falling back, he watched him as he opened it.

He could not see George's face, for some instinct had made him turn half round, rest his elbow on his knee, and shade his eyes with one hand as he prepared to read the paper he had opened.

It was a certificate of marriage between Gervase Noel and Maria Modena Preston.

George remained so long in the same position

that the sick man grew weary, and stretched out his hand, and touched him.

"Don't waste time. I am very ill," he murmured, fretfully. "I am going fast—fast."

George put back the paper, and stood up with his eyes fixed on the floor.

Noel scanned him with restless curiosity.

"You did not know or guess?" asked he.

George's honest eyes looked straight into his dying ones. Noel moved his hand, as if to say he believed him.

"I knew she would not love a rogue," said he, faintly, and began to weep. "She had enough of them in her vocation."

"Gervase Noel," said George, without moving or lifting his eyes, "there is but one thing I can do for you. I *will* do that thing, if it be in mortal man's power to do. I can say no more than this. I swear most solemnly I have not seen your wife for many days—know not where to seek her; yet seek her I will, as if my honour and life hung on the finding her."

Noel held out his hand.

"Let me thank you now, George Osborne, lest I be gone when you come back."

## CHAPTER XI.

### PALL MALL.

CLARENCE HARVEY, that is to say Maria, is alone in a miserable lodging, and feels her spirits in but too sad harmony with her surroundings.

Divided from General Langton in the moment of rush and escape from the terrible confusion and bloodshed of the last meeting at the miller's, on the day that has since become one to be talked about even by children and their grandams, in the remotest parts of the country, she knows not what to do, where to go, or how to put aside the painful recollections of Noel Gervase.

Is he dead, or is he recovering? Well, what is it to her after all? She will think no more, but only ask—when—oh, when shall she meet George and tell him how she has redeemed herself.

Dares she venture forth? And as Clarence Harvey? It was most important that she should remain unsuspected, except by her Chief, who still believed she was acting for him. She began to fear inquisitive people would connect Clarence Harvey and Maria

Modena Preston together. She bethought herself, as she stood considering, how that lady's long disappearance from her usual haunts would be likely to strengthen such a suspicion, had it once taken root. She looked out of the window. It was a warm, unhealthy morning; a sluggish breeze blew from the river; the spring sunshine seemed to be dragging itself wearily and sleepily along from house to house; a warm, unfragrant steam rose from the miry streets. It was just such a day, Maria thought to herself, as would bring the old fops of Pall Mall crawling out, like so many gay-coloured beetles from the earth. The sedan-chair bearers would be airing their splendid dresses in St. James's Street. The windows of the "Chocolate House," one of the most fashionable of London coffee-rooms, would be crowded with fine gallants—in fact, all the world would be abroad. How convenient for Clarence Harvey if Mistress Maria Modena Preston could only show herself there among her gay friends! And what a relief after all the violence, excitement, and bloodshed of the previous day!

General Langton, she did not doubt, was safe by this time; and probably on his way to France, or she would certainly know of his arrest.

All things combined to tempt her to snatch at some of her old enjoyments. Within three hours later Mistress Preston was riding slowly into Pall

Mall with Pompey on the steps of her carriage, and a crowd of gallants round her.

She wore a mantua petticoat, and sack of ruby-coloured velvet, and the richness and extravagant style of her dress, and her own bright face—fresh, insolent, and beautiful as ever—caused as much envy and jealousy amongst the women as it caused admiration amongst the gentlemen, both old and young.

She was most gracious in recognising all her friends, and, indeed, many of those whom most persons in her place would have called enemies. She kissed her fingers to touchy old Lord Richborough, with whom she had once had dealings, and who had charged her with being double-faced, and had threatened her with his stick. She nodded and smiled sweetly to the termagant Duchess of Mountjoy-Llanover, who had once boxed her ears for having political business with the duke without first consulting her grace.

The air of insolent graciousness and patronage with which she bowed to the most distinguished persons, attracted much intention.

“Who is she?” was asked on all sides, by those who had not seen her before; while such as knew her spread the news that the king’s pretty spy was again back from the Continent, and looking richer and handsomer than ever.

She alighted from her coach in St. James Street, where she had taken rooms opposite the Chocolate House; and going up-stairs, followed by Pompey, seated herself at an open window, directly facing another window at which a number of gentlemen were drinking wine. Maria did not recognise any friends among them, though she knew several by sight. There was a duke she had met once at Rome; also a general, and some young noblemen and officers who had danced with her at a masquerade.

Maria went out on to the wide leads, fanning herself, and looking as if she had no consciousness of the admiring regard of her opposite neighbours, who had now gathered close to the window.

Touching the dingy evergreens with her exquisite fingers, choosing bits of the pale flickering sunshine to stand in, as she saw the gay ladies in the street shun them, Maria lingered on the leads till a pleasurable flutter at her heart told her more than one handsome gallant had declared her to be "the prettiest woman in town, by G——!"

And, indeed, Mistress Preston was a pleasant sight for a spring day, as she moved hither and thither on the dreary-coloured leads, whereon the deep, warm hue of her dress, and her fair, fresh face, showed to wondrous advantage—as she knew. The gouty dandies in the street below shook their ruffles over their withered hands, gave their sticks a

youthful whirl, tossed back their borrowed ringlets, and felt themselves grow young again.

"Well, Pompey," said Maria, as she came in, "I have enjoyed myself to-day, if I die for it. What are you staring at, child?"

Following the direction of his eyes, she affected to see for the first time, and with much apparent confusion, the crowded window of the Chocolate House.

At that instant several gentlemen leaned forward, and raised their glasses.

Maria started—half turned as if to move away—then paused, turned back to the window, smiled, and curtsied low.

The interest of the distinguished group at the opposite window increased—more forms came to it. A passer-by, who had caught sight of Maria's bright, blushing face, stood still by the door of the Chocolate House.

Presently one of the gentlemen—a young officer of the Guards—who had been writing in his pocket-book, tore out the leaf, and gave it, in Maria's sight, to a waiter, who soon came across with it, and something wrapped in a napkin.

"Run down to the door, Pompey," said his mistress.

Pompey obeyed, and in a minute came running up, his face one broad grin, which it had caught

from the waiter, and delivered to Maria a tiny note and a bottle of Burgundy.

She let him bring her the paper close to the window, took it with an air of childish surprise, and read the pencilled lines, laughingly,—

“ When beauty’s eyes of heavenly light  
Across our glasses shine,  
The life, the fire, the colour bright  
Deserts the rosy wine.

“ Oh ! dull as Lethe’s tide ’twill stay,  
Till beauty’s self shall sip,  
And all her eyes have stolen away  
Yields back her balmy lip.”

Maria pulled her laughing mouth straight, and shook her head with an air of sweet seriousness as if saying, “ ’Tis too bad, gentlemen, to play with a poor little girl like me.” Then she said to Pompey,—

“ Really, child, these gentlemen are so gallant, I suppose I ought to drink their healths as they have drank mine. Now fill me a glass and give it me very prettily on your knees ; and then we’ll close the blinds and shut them out.”

Pompey came and went down on his small knees to give her the wine, and Maria drank to the gentlemen like a little queen pledging her courtiers.

As she rose from the most profound and charming curtsy, her eye fell, for the first time, on the person



who had stopped in the street against the coffee-house door, and who had been intently observing her for some minutes.

Her bright smile changed to a look of exquisite pain; she turned from the window, burst into tears, and stamped her foot at Pompey, which so frightened him that he ran and hid himself behind a chair.

His mistress soon looked from the window again, and saw George Osborne crossing the road.

He had scarcely reached the door before the waiter came skipping over the road with another dainty little note.

Maria turned from the window with burning cheeks.

"Run, Pompey, run!" cried she.

Pompey ran to the door.

"Stay, Pompey; what are you going to do, sir?"

"Run, missis," answered Pompey, showing the whites of his eyes distractedly, as he got behind another chair.

"Little wretch! listen. Go and bring up the gentleman who will ask for me, then down with you again and tell the waiter to take back what he has brought to him that sent it."

Pompey ran all round the table to get to the door without coming in reach of his mistress's impatient hand, and by the time he got to the stairs a step well known to Maria was heard on them.

She sank down on a chair by the table, and covered her eyes with her hand.

She heard George enter and pause at the sight of her, and for once in her life felt too much of a coward to move.

It was so hard, Maria thought, after all she had gone through for George's sake, and to make herself more worthy of him—it was so hard that it should be her fate to meet him after their long separation under circumstances like these; to feel that he was standing there looking on her, she was sure, with bitter contempt!

"I bring you a note, Mistress Preston, from your friends over the way," said George.

Maria snatched it from him, tore it in pieces, burst into another fit of weeping, and hid her face.

"Maria," said George, gently.

She took her hand from her eyes, saying, passionately,—

"Do not mock me. You despise me—tell me so!"

Looking up at him, she saw his face was very pale, and his clothes travel-stained.

"Pardon me," said he, quietly, seeing her look of wonder, "pardon me, madam, for coming to you here amongst your fine acquaintances in such a plight as this. My excuse must be that it is *you* I have been seeking the whole day."

"Seeking me! And why?"

"Because I have needed your presence this day, Maria, as I have never needed it before."

Maria rose, trembling with surprise and delight.

"George," she sobbed, standing before him with eyes cast down, "I must seem to you very worthless. I do seem very worthless to myself; I own it was my frivolous love of excitement, and nothing more or less to my discredit, made me allow such a scene as you have witnessed just now; but, George, if indeed, I could believe—might dare to think you would seek me—would come to me as a refuge from any kind of grief or adversity, though you were too poor to buy me bread, too sick to work for me, I think, George, in receiving you I should receive a new heart, a new soul, all joy and love, and having no room for sin."

"Poverty or sickness, Maria, would be light in comparison with the grief that has fallen upon me, and that has made me come to you."

"Oh, George!" cried she, "believe me, 'tis none so heavy but Maria will think it happiness to share it with you. Confide in me. What is this sorrow? Come," she said, laying her hand on his shoulder, and resting her wet cheek on his arm. "I hunger for my share of it. George, give it me."

George looked down on the sweet face and loving

eyes, and his chest heaved. He stooped, and whispered hoarsely—

“I will, Maria. Oh, trust me, I will share it with you; but not in this place—not here, amidst this splendour, and with yon brave gallants looking on.”

“Pompey, my hood. Quick, quick!” said Maria.  
“Now, George to what corner of the earth you will! Lead, and I follow!”

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE PASSING BELL.

DARKNESS thinly strewn with stars was over Spital-fields when George led Maria to the good weaver's door.

"Is it the house of a friend, then, you take me to?" Maria had asked, during their hurried journey.

"It is."

"Ay, of yours; but shall I find a friend in him, think you?—for alack, George, owing to my unfortunate business, I know there are more than you would credit too ready to do me an ill turn."

"Maria, I believe, on my soul, that this man to whom we go would not wish to harm you if he knew every error of your life."

"Ah, you judge by your own charity."

"Nay, mistress; by his."

The weaver, instead of opening the door in answer to George's low knock, softly raised the window.

"'Tis I," said George. "How fares our friend?"

"Hush!" returned a voice, in a whisper full of terror. "The house is watched. Spies are about. Go down to Number 9; 'tis empty. Here is the key. Catch it! There's a door opening to the leads like mine. You can go along the house tops, and get into his room that way."

George then whispered something Maria could not hear, and the weaver answered—

"It's to begin when he sees a light at this window."

"Put one there now," said George; and, hastily drawing Maria's arm through his, went towards the house to which the weaver had directed him.

The key turned rustily in the lock, and the door creaked rustily on its hinges as George pushed it open.

"How dark it is!" said Maria, clinging to his arm fearfully as he closed the door.

"Courage, mistress! Trust me, I will find the way."

He half carried her up the creaking stairs, which he ascended at a great speed, often nearly treading on the rats and mice that ran up and down in their alarm at the untimely intrusion.

Maria drew a long breath of relief when she felt the leads under her feet and the fresh night air on her face.

When they got to the weaver's roof, George made

her sit down on the low wall that divided the houses.

Maria was glad enough to do this, for, though she had uttered no word of complaint at his impetuous haste and strange manner, she was quivering all over with alarm and fatigue. Her alarm, however, was for George. She could not imagine what great calamity had befallen him.

She asked herself a thousand questions on the journey, and to none could find an answer which seemed the true one. Had he turned Jacobite? Was his life in danger? Was he thinking of making her his wife and flying the country?

While she sat trembling, she glanced round at the inhabitants of the leads—the poor weaver's pets—the singing birds and pigeons in their rude houses asleep, and the rabbits peeping from their hutch and moving their long ears nervously up and down at the sound of George's restless step.

A large, round, copper-coloured moon had risen, and the forms of the crowded chimneys stood out one by one in a strange and ghostly manner, stealing on the sight suddenly and silently like a band of midnight assassins.

Maria's nerves were wrought up to a painful pitch with fatigue and suspense, and there seemed something truly ominous and frightful in the night. Since she felt the first breath of air on her face on

issuing from the deserted house, it seemed to her there was none left to breathe. The gaudy little weather-cocks which the children had put on their pigeon-houses stood still; a cat hung with her front paws and half her body over the slope of a dovecote, and waited, with green eyes and lashing tail, the moment to spring.

Suddenly there was heard a loud, dismal sound, which lingered and vibrated shudderingly in the stagnant air.

"What sound was that, George?" asked Maria, rising and clinging to him.

"What?"

"That—that!" cried she, as it was heard again  
"Tell me, what is it?"

"That," answered George. "'Tis but the passing-bell. Why should it startle you?"

"I do not know. I suppose 'tis hearing it in the night, and in this strange place. Shall we not go down now into the house?"

"Ay, presently. But hearken, Maria, does the tolling seem to tell of nothing but death?"

"No. And it is hideous—it will crack my ears!"

"And yet, sweet mistress, *I* seem to hear in it a jubilant bridal peal."

"Dear George, what mean you?"

"It seems to tell me that Maria will accept her



husband—her one faithful love—in this house, in this hour.”

“Has not her heart done so long since, my George?”

“Nay, but to be his—entirely his—till death do them part.”

“Oh, my love, your words would make me happy, but that your voice terrifies me. I fear you hide some great sorrow. Confide it to me, George; but take me away from here—away from the sound of that fearful bell.”

“Why should it have such terrors for you, Maria? You have no friend who lays a-dying this night?”

“No, no,” cried Maria, as Noel’s pale face and dark pathetic eyes rose before her, and made her clutch George’s arm. The bell became more unendurable; she trembled each time it tolled, as if an electric shock had gone through her frame.

“It has a solemn sound, assuredly,” said George, “for a betrothal night. What fancy you it is saying, Maria, to such as may have injured the man whose soul is passing away? Hark! does it threaten them, or does it summon them to the death-bed to seek the pardon of the dying for who knows what fearful injuries, what treachery, what crimes?”

The moon looked on them with a face so red and glaring; the night was so silent, but for the tolling of the bell; George’s voice was so hoarse and strange,

that Maria, full of awe, again sat down tremblingly on the low brickwork.

"Come," said George, taking her hand, "let us go down into the house. Why should you be disturbed by a sound? Let us go in and shut it out, and leave it to shake such hearts as may be guilty of embittering the last moments of the dying—guilty, perhaps, of cruelly hastening his death. Nay, why turn back, Maria?"

Maria had broken from him as he lifted the door opening on a little flight of steps, leading down into the sick man's room.

It was no sound from there had startled her, but the passing bell that had so strange a fascination over her; she stood with her palms pressed against her brow, as if rooted to the spot.

George tried to take her hand, but she turned upon him wildly.

"George! George! mock me no more. What means that bell? 'Tis me it threatens—me it calls. It cracks my ears, my heart—'twill drive me mad. Tell me who lays a-dying. Why have you brought me here?"

"To see your work, mistress," answered George, seizing her hand, and half lifting her down the steps.

Her hand grew icily cold in George's as they reached the floor of the room, and came in sight of

the bed and its occupant, and within hearing of a man's voice, faint and hoarse, singing some doggrel Jacobite verses :

"'Twas in no distant reign, my dear,  
And in no distant land-a,  
All of one mind, some boys combined  
To take a thing in hand-a.

"A certain day, a certain hour—  
But, oh, 'tis neatly planned-a;  
And stand or fall, we'll once for all  
Just take the thing in hand-a."

"Gervase Noel," said George, leading Maria's tottering steps to the bedside, "I have kept my promise."

The dark eyes looked at them both vacantly.

Maria threw herself, with a shriek, at George's feet.

"'Tis here you should kneel, Mistress Noel," said George moving away, and taking the dying man's hand. "See, friend, I have brought your wife to you—she is on her knees, waiting your forgiveness."

Noel grasped his hand, and, making a movement as if he were turning over papers, said—

"Look, we turned these out last night, and they listening and watching the house the whole time. You know at whose door to lay this—'A Treat for a Traitor;' and this—'A Word for a Waverer.' And these, with the Flower-de-Luce on them, I'll

drop about myself in the right quarters. You know what the Flower-de-Luce stands for? Here, let me whisper—*French aid*, my boy. We bring it out in this way.”

And he began to sing again :

“Oh, why are we waiting, waiting, waiting?  
Hark! the guest is at the door.  
The oven is hot, and the cakes a-burning—  
What are we waiting, waiting for?

“Oh, why are we waiting, waiting, waiting—  
Why do we waiting, waiting, stand?  
Oh, is he the guest of our inviting—  
Has he the Flower-de-Luce in's hand?”

“For heaven's sake,” said the weaver, coming to the door, “keep him quiet. I tell you the house is watched—they'll be upon us directly. Remember Elizabeth Gaunt!”

Maria dragged herself on her knees to the low bed, sobbing—

“Hush, Noel—hush!”

“Or this,” said Noel, “which is a song that seems to mean nothing :

“Oh, the cypress for death, and the rose for love ;  
But tell me unto what use  
Shall we put that flower, all flowers above—  
The beautiful Flower-de-Luce ?”

“Oh, hush—hush!” sobbed Maria, drawing his head to her, and silencing the blue lips by laying her finger on them.

"What was that?" he cried, trying to start up. "Ha! we are surprised. To work, boys! here, throw this type among the coals! Quick, I hear them on the stairs! Now, now!"

He sank back on the pillow, pale and exhausted.

"My friend," said he, presently in an altered tone, "a little water."

George bent over him with the cup. He opened his eyes, and seeing George's face, flushed, and gasped—

"*You* back." Then, bursting into tears, cried, in a voice of anguish—

"Ah! then she will not come."

George gently lifted the head, so that the eyes could see Maria's bowed form,

A look of divine joy softened the glassy eyes for an instant, and making an effort to reach his wife, and whispering "God bless her!" Gervase Noel fell back in her arms—dead.

She turned to look after George. He was gone; gone she felt for ever.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### HOW FRIGHTENED LONDON REVENGES ITSELF.

THE insurrection and the assassination plots having both failed, there remained only for government to try all the criminals who were thought worthy of prosecution; for the judges and juries to condemn and sentence; for the scaffold at Tyburn to be got ready; and for the cruel mob of London to wait gloatingly for their promised sport.

Terrible as such a word seems when applied to the fate of men who have to undergo the most awful of worldly ordeals—men who, if erring, are still human—no other epithet is so fitted to express the kind of pleasurable expectation with which the mob of the metropolis in the century before last, scented, vulture-like, the smell of blood.

It is not very wonderful that even at the present humaner time Englishmen can be found to perpetuate in the abused name of law and order, the most shocking atrocities, when we recall what their forefathers were. Scarcely a noticeable London street then existed in which the black, hideous monstrosity of

the scaffold had not been at some time or other erected. Judges, juries, and bystanders alike seemed to enjoy their feast of blood. The Scotch judge who fell asleep during a dull speech in a civil cause, and, being suddenly disturbed, said, before he was half awake, "Hang him! hang him!" may be taken as a not unfair illustration of the value attached to human life in the minds of the executive. You could not enter London in any direction but you found permanent evidences of the ghastly fact. If you came up the river, you saw, at regular intervals, the bones of pirates bleaching in their iron chains. If you entered by green lanes from the country, the case was even worse. It was a subject of complaint on the part of a newspaper of even a later time than is dealt with here, that "*all* the gibbets in the Edgware Road, on which *many* malefactors were hung in chains, were cut down by persons unknown." Temple Bar on the west, and London Bridge on the east, each with its little forest of poles and heads, as representing the interior of London, gave a kind of representative finish and completeness to the hideous brutalities of justice.

As many as eighty thousand persons sometimes attended a single execution; and cases have occurred of such violence on the part of these multitudes that the criminal has begged the executioner to hurry on his work, lest the human furies yelling

about him should break in upon the officers of justice, and tear him to pieces in their own more cruel way.

And now once more all the hideous scum of London is gathering and foaming in the streets on the way to Tyburn.

Who are the victims to-day?

Not youths who have robbed their master's tills; not half-starved mothers snatching a loaf of bread or a joint of meat to take home to their children; not clippers, or coiners, or forgers, or murderers. No; these are the usual cases with which the gallows deals so largely. But to-day the criminals are of a very different class.

Dressed in the very perfection of the gentleman's costume of the time, smiling gaily in answer to every savage, and brutal, and obscene taunt—moved only to deep emotion and tears when they see those on the route whom they dare not attempt to speak to—wives, brothers, sisters, friends (if such there are waiting)—on they go, heeding little the degradation of the mud-stained and jolting cart, giving at times a shout of—"Old England for ever! Hurrah for dear old England!"

Already three of the conspirators, including Keyes, the life guardsman, have suffered on the scaffold; but to-day, public interest culminates—for Sir W. Larkyns, and Mr. Maltby, the rich brewer, are



among the five fresh victims doomed—and which it is believed will be the last.

Wonderful to say the priest who waits upon them, administering the sacred offices of the church, is no other than the Jesuit who had shared in the murderous scheme, and animated the failing hearts of those present with new resolve. But he has disguised his face with such consummate skill, and he has been so little known in England, that even the unhappy men he administers ghostly counsel to, have no suspicion of the truth. The Jesuit's object in running so fearful and, from his point of view, heroic a risk, was no doubt, to prevent the dying men from making any revelations injurious to the cause—and to the church.

He has another duty—that of assuaging the bitter feeling among these unfortunates on account of the two-fold plot. The insurrectionist Maltby, thinks his life might have been spared but for the odium excited by the assassination plot to which he had so unwillingly consented.

Sir W. Larkyns, on the other hand, thinks that the very sacrifice of reputation in addition to life for the holy cause ought, at least, to win for him the sympathy of all Jacobites.

The Jesuit allays their bitterness—makes them speak kindly to and forgive each other, and exchange the kiss of peace in death, in token of

the new spirit of union and brotherhood among the whole Jacobite body.

He holds a book in his hand, and from time to time reads a prayer, his voice rising solemnly above all the roar of the bigotry and the rascaldom around; then he speaks, now to the one man, now to the other, especially directing himself to him who seems even for a moment cast down; and then again he breaks out with a psalm of rejoicing, while the unhappy Jacobites join in.

At St. Giles's Church, the usual stopping-place where condemned criminals may halt and drink, at the well-known ale-house that stands there, they call for wine, and drink to the health of "King James!"

Shouts of rage, speedily followed by showers of mud and stones, are the penalties for this political gallantry and devotion to a lost cause. But the mob is not entirely insensible to the true quality of the behaviour of the condemned men; and so disputes arise, and curses are exchanged, then blows, and a very pretty riot is got up in the rear of the melancholy cavalcade, which consequently is permitted to finish its route without further molestation.

On reaching Tyburn a new and wonderful spectacle presented itself—one that for the moment shook the equanimity of the conspirators, though the feeling soon passed away, and then they seemed to acknow-

ledge the incident as only a new mark of distinction.

An immense semicircle of scaffolding and timber had been erected in front of the gallows, and there all the wealthier spectators of the spectacle were congregated, row above row.

"It reminds one," said the gouty knight to the Jesuit, "of a Roman holiday; only they did give the poor wretches, the gladiators, a chance against the wild beasts. Old as I am, I would fight for life, if they would give me a sword and a combatant, and say I should go to death or freedom!"

"My son, my son," said the Jesuit, "give not your mind to vain thoughts;" and he made the knight repeat a brief prayer after him.

Just as the work of death was about to begin, and the Jacobites were passed up towards the last earthly resting-place of their feet, an extraordinary incident occurred. It was noon. The hour for the execution had been fixed at twelve. Almost at the very instant the clock began to give warning a darkness came on; and so thickly, that the executioner paused on the scaffold to turn to look upon the sky; the human ocean, the mob, became suddenly still with superstitious fear, and the Jacobites themselves stood wonderingly, and trembled with the irresistible and sudden hope of escape—somehow.

A wild and foolish thought. And they knew it was

so almost before they had time to recognise the thought itself; and heroic though fanaticism had made them, they could not but feel the bitterness of death in all its intensity, through that rush of the soul to the opening vista of relief.

And still the darkness increased, till, as many aged voices were heard to declare, it exceeded the darkness of the greatest eclipses they could remember.

Others pointed out how wonderfully like it was to the darkness that preceded some of the more famous earthquakes. Then, as now, came with the darkness hail, rain, wind, and lightning. Driving from the north, where the first cloud was seen, right over London, it swept on into the country beyond. In Kent, the storm was so furious, as to destroy fowl and sheep, and devastate the fields in more than twenty parishes.

"'Tis the voice of God!" solemnly cried the Jesuit, and his voice in that awful lull was distinctly heard.

"Rescue!" was now the cry of some friendly Jacobite.

"Did you hear that cry?" asked the Jesuit of the knight.

"Yes. Do you know whose cry it was?"

"I think I do—General Langton's."

"Is it possible?"

"Listen. This may be serious!"

The first cry of "Rescue" had been a failure. The solitary voice was noticed, but no one took up the cry.

Just then a blinding flash of lightning, followed by a terrific and almost endless peal of thunder, caused the mob to become perfectly ungovernable.

"Rescue! Rescue! Stop the hanging! 'Tis the voice of God, as the priest says. Shall we not listen to *Him*?" repeated the voice.

"Rescue! Rescue!" now shouted out scores of voices.

"Yes, it was General Langton," said the knight to the Jesuit.

"Rescue! Rescue!"

The cry was caught up as if in a feeling of electric sympathy.

"Rescue! Rescue! Up to the scaffold! Release the men!" shouted the maddened and utterly inconsistent crowd.

The heaving masses began to beat against the barriers, and to threaten the constables and soldiery inside; who saw their lives would not be worth ten minutes' purchase if those countless thousands did recklessly rush upon them. They would be stifled and choked out of life, by the mere brute force and weight, before their weapons could be made to tell on such a raging horde of men, and of still fiercer furies, the women.

The sheriff sent off a mounted horseman for the military, and did his best to control the mob.

The Jacobites themselves seemed to lend a new grace to their sacrifice. One of them begged permission for the priest to address the populace. The officials, for their own safety's sake, managed to show to the people that they were specially appealed to. Gradually there was silence.

The Jesuit stood on the edge of the scaffold to speak.

"Jesuit! Papist! Stone him! No Jesuit!" Such were the cries that welcomed him, and which soon became so overwhelming that he was obliged to retire, and let Maltby the Brewer come to the front; who whispered to the Jesuit, as he passed—

"I see troops in the distance; that game is up. So I shall go on the other tack."

Had the Jesuit, just for a moment, lost his fortitude too, and thought he saw a chance for the escape of his friends through exciting the passions of the mob?

Who shall say?

The Brewer evidently thought this was what the Jesuit had intended, and he saw its hopelessness when the military reinforcements appeared advancing. But he and the Jesuit had no further communication. As he was about to address the people, and

show them the uselessness of a riot, a regiment of horse marched right upon the enormous crowd of people, just as though they saw nothing of the living wall before them, and meant to go right through it.

In an instant there was a wild cry of alarm, and an attempt to rush away. But the attempt was hopeless, except for those who, being on the outside, might pass from the great body by running away on either side of the advancing military.

Already many men and women were lying on the ground, and being trodden upon by the undulating, frightened mob, when the sheriff raised his hand, and checked the march of the soldiery in time to prevent one of the most awful episodes of an execution tragedy.

The horsemen drew rein. The people gradually calmed down. Artillery came up and pointed their cannon. And then—

Why, then the Jacobites resigned themselves calmly to their fate; and the mob had the heartfelt satisfaction, before they left the place, of knowing they had not been balked of their holiday.

“Do *you* want to share their fate?” asked one man of another, whose back was turned to the querist, as the mighty crowd began, late in the afternoon, to disperse.

"No, my friend," was the reply, over the shoulder. The two faces then met, and exchanged glances.

"George!"

"Daniel Sterne! For mercy sake, let me tell the Mercer and Mistress Christina that you are gone!"

"You may. All was prepared for a rescue, had there really been a chance. The chance having failed, all is prepared for my flight to Paris."

"And then?" queried George.

"*Then?* Ah, who shall say? Farewell."

"Farewell."

And the two separated, and were soon lost in the diverging streams of life into which they passed.

Presently, George however had another meeting. Maria met him, and was about to speak, but he held up his hand, as if to bid her be silent, looked at her sternly, and passed on. Nor did the burst of laughter, that followed him, whether in impudent mockery, or in hysteric anguish, change his purpose. These two passed on their several ways.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE MERCER THANKS GOD HE IS LOYAL.

THERE is one metropolitan household where the ferocious thirst for the blood of Jacobites finds no sympathetic chord. On the contrary, the Mercer as he sits at breakfast at Blackheath on the day after the last of the executions, reading the newspaper accounts of the horrid tragedy, shows by his face, his features, and his whole demeanour how deeply the story moves him.

Christina enters the room, and comes with her usual kiss and smile ; but forgets to give the kiss, while the smile dies out, as she sees the tearful and agitated face of Sir Richard.

“No fresh calamity, papa ?”

“I suppose, Teena, we must call it the winding-up of the old calamity, and, therefore, in that sense, not new ; but, whatever it may be called, already seven gallant gentlemen have gone to their last account for this terrible business.”

“And our guest, papa, where—oh, where is

lie? Oh, papa, do you think that he is really safe?"

"Yes, I think so—I hope so. But there is an ominous-looking paragraph in connection with the second execution, which I will read you. Open the window, darling, for a few minutes, to let in the pleasant air and the sun. It is quite warm and spring-like. Ah, Teena, what a sad world this is, and what a bright one it might be!"

Teena opened the window, and the smell of violets came into the room. Then, putting on a light cloak for protection, and drawing the hood over her head, she went back to the breakfast-table to listen; looking a very picture of anxious suspense, even while she seemed to be enjoying this first promise of the spring's dawn.

"A curious and, if true, most characteristic episode of the proceedings at the execution of Maltby and Sir W. Larkyns is narrated. It is said that the arch-traitor and rebel, General Lord Langton, was actually present during the proceedings, and that it was his voice that first raised the cry of rescue. Probably, however, this was only the fancy of some heated partisan. For whatever claim his lordship *might* have had upon the clemency of the authorities, on account of his manly exposure of the murder-plot, is far more than counterbalanced by the wicked and insane attempt made at the same moment to carry the country into civil war. We have had a gentleman in our office—whose name, of course, we are not at liberty to mention—but he assures us, from individual knowledge, that nothing can exceed the personal irritation of his majesty the king, and that he has said again and again these words:

"Let him look well to his own safety; for, if caught, no power on earth shall save him from the axe and the block!"

"Indeed, it begins to be pretty generally believed that Lord Langton, though young in years, is old in craft; and that he has, for his own purpose, allowed the murder-plot to go on when he might have arrested it. His object being, first, to have a strong personal claim on his majesty King William, in case of failure and arrest; and, secondly, in order to let the alarm of the projected murder banish from the minds of the authorities all thought of the danger overhanging them of an insurrection through him. And this is the theory accepted, not only by the courtiers, but by the most intelligent and candid observers."

"There, Teena! There's the gratitude of a prince, or of a prince's partisans!" exclaimed the Mercer, with great indignation. "He has saved the king's life—risked his own life in doing it—and now the king—or, rather, I hope, the king's ministers, are clamorous for his blood! Well, well, Teena, we must try to forget these things, or they will drive us mad! I tremble to think how easily I might have been one of that unfortunate group of gentlemen yesterday!"

"No, papa, that is impossible, because you have never given the slightest aid or countenance to the scheme."

"No, thank God! A thousand times let me be thankful for that! But let me whisper to you, Teena. You know not how easily I might have been induced to join them, if I had not resolutely steeled my heart against the legitimate king by——"

He stops abruptly. Christina looks at him, and is appalled, and then her eyes turn to look in the

same direction as the Mercer is looking, and she sees what he sees.

"Oh, papa, papa! Not for you! It cannot be for you!"

With a low cry of anguish she clasps him round, and then with him gazes on the spectacle outside the window.

A man in civilian's dress, unknown to the Mercer, but who was no other than the dreaded Chief of the Secret Police, stands there, with his left hand on the sill, his right levelling a cocked pistol at Sir Richard, while beyond him, on the lawn, are ranged a file of soldiers, with an officer at their head.

The Chief now steps into the room through the window, and in a loud, unfeeling voice says:

"Sir Richard Constable, and you, Mistress Christina Constable, I arrest you both in the king's name for high treason. There is my warrant."

"Sir, you jest!" began Sir Richard. "I *can* understand that a man innocent and loyal as I am may fall under momentary suspicion, but I never before knew of gentlemen of your quality going about to take possession of babes and sucklings! Look at her, sir. A mere child. Pray do not make even loyalty itself seem ridiculous by warring with a simple creature like this."

And then he turned away from the sinister and

inscrutable face of the civilian to the officer, and repeated his words: "Look at her, sir."

"*I have looked at her, Sir Richard,*" interposed the Chief, silencing by a wave of his hand the officer who began to speak; "and I have not the slightest objection to your proving her innocence. But if you ask me to judge of her innocence and her position by her age, I can only reply, you are both going where you will have before you the scene of the execution of Lady Jane Grey and her youthful husband, who could scarcely have been older than this young lady."

Then, seeing the deadly pallor that overspread both the prisoner's faces, he began to half apologise for his brutality by an excuse about the dangers and wickedness of the time, when assassination itself could find its instruments in high places.

"On the word of a man who has never, I dare to say it, been convicted of a lie, or of a broken oath, I assure you, in the deepest sincerity and solemnity of my heart, that I and my daughter are clearly, unmistakably, absolutely innocent of all this shocking business."

"Pity, then, Sir Richard, that you should talk in your supposed privacy of a legitimate king, who clearly was not King William."

"No, sir; pardon me. A fact is a fact. I was a Jacobite, many, many years ago; and the words

you overheard were merely the accidental ones relating to a phrase then common among us, and which is still true, in *my* sense of the words, which was not that of sovereign right, but merely of descent in blood."

"Ingenious, Sir Richard, no doubt; but, as you put these things to me, I may ask why a gentleman who can make such exceedingly nice distinctions in words should have been found in act harbouring the chief rebel."

"Not since he became a rebel," stoutly exclaimed Sir Richard. "I can explain everything satisfactorily, both as regards myself and my daughter here. Meantime, let me tell you there is one person who I am sure will be satisfied of our innocence—Lady Hermia Bridgeminster."

"Indeed!" said the Chief, with quite a new look in his face. "You could have no more influential friend, if she be a friend of yours."

"I have said all this," continued Sir Richard, "not because I am weak enough or wicked enough to try to influence you wrongly, but merely that I may appeal to you to soften the blow to my dear girl who——"

"Oh, papa, papa! Think not of me! I can bear, I am sure I can, if you will."

"I *will*, my child."

"Dear, dear papa," she whispered, nestling to his

breast, "will they let us go together? Oh, if they will only do that, I could bear even the awful prison!"

Sir Richard put the question to the Chief, who shook his head as in doubt, but added that the matter would rest with the governor of the Tower.

"The Tower! Must we go there?" asked the Mercer, in dismay.

"Yes."

"Come, then, sir, give me and my daughter a few minutes to prepare necessaries. Take my word, I will not attempt to escape."

"You will neither of you be permitted out of my sight till I resign you to the governor of the Tower," was the reply. "But you can take an hour, or more if you wish. You can send for any servants you require; you can give them your orders; and, if it is possible that a servant for each of you may be permitted to lodge in the Tower, I dare say you may be so far indulged."

Heavy marching steps were now heard in the corridor outside. The door opened, and soldiers, unseen before, and their presence unknown, came into the room, one of them carrying a large tray filled with loose papers, letters, and bulkier documents. Another soldier carried a stick, which he amused himself by looking at in a significant and inquisitive way, and which was instantly taken from him by the Chief.

"This is all that we can find of any importance," said one of the men.

The Mercer understood then that his house had been ransacked from top to bottom—no warning given—his most secret cabinets and most cherished treasures no doubt rifled.

The incident seemed to raise the Mercer's courage.

"I am glad of this, gentlemen—glad that you know I have been surprised, and had no time nor opportunity for concealment. I now, before you all, challenge the proof of my guilt or innocence by your present discoveries. If you find aught in my house compromising me, then I acknowledge boldly I am guilty, and will henceforward ask no man's sympathy or help."

The men set to work to seal up into two or three parcels all the papers; and when the officer had impressed his seal on the fastenings, he invited the Mercer to do the same with his signet, so that he might be sure the contents would not be tampered with before reaching the government.

"No fear of that in *your* hands," said Sir Richard, with a sort of attempt at a chivalrous courtesy that he scarcely felt; for he noticed that some mysterious conversation was going on in a low undertone between the chief and the soldier who had brought the stick.



The Chief turned the stick about in all sorts of directions, tapped it in different parts with the hilt of his sword, and finally said to the Mercer, with a penetrating and ominous look—

“A curiosity, I should say, and worthy particular examination.”

“What stick is it?” demanded the Mercer. “I never saw it before to my knowledge. Certainly it is not mine.”

The Chief took the stick in both hands, and broke it across his knee, and lo! the thin metal rod within also broke, and in breaking broke the paper that was wrapped round the rod! The secret place of deposit was then discovered, and the letter of the French king to General Langton drawn forth.

All the facts now looked very grave. It was a matter of common report that General Langton carried in his pocket or in his brain the power to bring over a French army; and though this letter was merely personal and complimentary, not political, still it was a serious thing to find such a document in the house of a man suspected, for other reasons, of Jacobite plots.

But the Chief who had thus made one discovery was not long in making another. The extreme ingenuity used in concealing the French king's letter made him wonder whether still greater ingenuity

might not have been used for the concealment of a document infinitely more compromising.

Taking the broken pieces in hand for a more minute examination, he soon dismissed as unprofitable the upper end of the stick, and bent his attention to the lower.

Scrutinising the fragment of the metal rod, and the piece of stick in which it was embedded, he saw the possibility of some very minute chamber being formed in the tip of the stick, in connection with the base of the metal rod.

He looked at the tip, rubbed it with his handkerchief, scraped it with his knife, and suddenly his sinister face lighted up, as he again glanced at the Mercer, and said—

“The ‘door,’ I think!”

The Mercer deprecatingly shook his head, and waved with his hands, as he answered—

“As God is my judge, I know nothing of it!—Nothing!”

The “door” was a faint circle in the centre of the tip, which implied that there was a movable piece fitted tightly in.

But how to get at the secret of the key?

The Chief, greatly amused, ordered a hammer to be brought; and a smart, elastic kind of blow was struck on it, that shattered the fabric without too far defacing the materials.

The nut was broken open, and the kernel was indeed for the Mercer a bitter one.

There lay the original commission, given to General Langton by King James to consult with the Jacobites in order to prepare the civil war.

"I am not General Langton!" was all the Mercer could say when this was shown to him. "I am innocent! I am innocent!"

"Where was this stick found?" demanded the Chief of the soldier.

"Most ingeniously hidden away behind the skirting of a private closet where, the servants say, Sir Richard kept his money chest, and all his private and valuable things."

"Oh, heaven help us, for heaven only can!" passionately cried Christina; her indignation struggling with her fright—her rising colour conflicting with her flow of tears.

"Your own carriage will take you," said the Chief: "They are getting it ready."

"Will you permit me to write a couple of short notes while we wait?" asked the knight.

"To whom?"

"To Lady Hermia for one."

"Certainly," was the immediate rejoinder.

"And the other to my servant, who unfortunately is in London, whither I have sent him."

"No objection to that either," said the officer.

The Mercer sat down, wrote his two notes, and when they were finished, handed them for perusal to the officer, who respectfully declined to read the note to Lady Hermia; but read the other carefully, which was addressed "To my serving man, George Osborne."

These were the notes:—

"DEAR LADY HERMIA,—You will not, I hope, think me or poor Teena guilty of rebellion because we happen to be arrested as rebels; nor will you, I am sure, shut your heart to the cry of your favourite, for whose wits I am seriously apprehensive if they divide her from me in the Tower, whither we are now going."

That was the one letter. What was the meaning and origin of the other? Perhaps the reader may better judge after reading it:—

"GEORGE,—Your master is arrested, and is going to the Tower, for matters you, my poor, faithful boy, will scarcely ever understand. But don't be ashamed of your old master when men tell you he is a rebel. Keep a civil tongue in your head, and say it is not true, and that so it will prove.

"The gentleman who is with me thinks the governor may kindly allow you to wait upon me there; so bring with you a few changes of linen, another suit of clothes, and whatever else you think I am likely to want.

"RICHARD CONSTABLE."

"Perhaps you will allow my groom to ride off with this letter?" said the knight. "It will certainly be a comfort to have my man near me, even if he may not stay in the cell."

"Oh, certainly! If it can be managed it shall. I will myself speak to the governor."

As they were getting into the carriage, Sir Richard made for the first time an opening to whisper to Christina—

"It is done. Should George be in danger, I have successfully warned him! He's sharp, and will understand my letter."

The entrance to the Tower was so well managed by the forethought of the officer, who proved kind alike in word and act, when no longer under the eye and direction of the Chief, that no special sight of its terrible gateways and towers increased the alarm of Christina.

She held always the hand of the Mercer; and then, as the tears coursed down his rugged face, she would wipe them away, and kiss him, and smile, and nestle in his breast as before, saying nothing, but expressing all.

But when she found that she was to be divided from him, all her patience, all her strength, all her fortitude gave way; and one shriek after another rang through the terrible passages and gloomy dungeons of the Tower.

"She will go mad! She will go mad!" pleaded the unhappy Mercer. "Spare me, spare her, and spare your king and government that calamity."

And then as he held her, Lear-like, fainting in his arms, whither she had flown back from the hands of the warders, he again said—

“As you are men, I conjure you not to war with this poor child! Shut us up where you like, only leave us together!”

The governor himself now came in, and addressed the knight with a respect that visibly affected him. To him, therefore, he urged his appeal, in glowing and eloquent language, and at last succeeded.

“It is a scarcely warrantable indulgence, Sir Richard,” he said; “but, for the maiden’s sake, I do grant it.”

“Dost thou hear, Teena? Teena—Teena, darling! We are to be together! She’ll be better presently. Oh, yes! Could you give me a little water! Thanks! There! There! Thank goodness, Teena, you are better—you are recovering. Good news! Good news!”

“Oh, papa! Where have I been?” Then, as she looked about her, her frame visibly shuddered, and they were afraid she would relapse.

“My dear young lady,” said the governor, “you and your father shall not be divided. I will give you two adjoining cells, and my wife will gladly render you any aid she can!”

Christina looked at him with quivering lips, and

seemed to understand him, and, by degrees, grew calmer—stronger.

In a short time they were settled in their cells, and left alone—alone to commune together, and to speculate, hour after hour, as to the meaning of all these things ; and, above all, as to the terrible document discovered in the stick, and the hand that must have placed it there.

“Can General Langton have hidden it there, and forgotten it ?” asked Christina, uneasily.

“No. He has shown himself too careful of me, for us to think of any solution of that kind. Besides, he never was in my bedroom, much less in my closet, unless he went there clandestinely. But, pooh ! we waste time to discuss such incredible nonsense !”

“How, then, could the stick get there ?” mused Christina.

“Teena,” said the Mercer, passionately, “if there is one devil in a human shape more likely than another to have purposely concealed that stick in my closet, it is——”

“No, no !” faltered Christina, when she saw he hesitated to pronounce the name.

“Ah, well, I name no names, but we shall see !”

Towards dusk they were interrupted. The door

was opened, a man was almost thrust in upon them, and the door instantly re-closed.

"George, are you mad! Miserable boy, what brings you here?" cried the Mercer, in low stifled tones.

"Your letter, master," said George, with an affectation of playing the servitor.

"You do not mean that you have had so little sense as ——"

"As to misunderstand your letter? No, my dear master, I understood it only too well, and its noble motive. But did you think I would by flight, make your position still worse? Mercy forbid! So here I am, innocent as yourself; and happily able to go in and out in your service, and Miss Christina's."

What Christina thought to see George there in that horrible place—coming like an angel of light to comfort them—we shall not attempt to describe. She was afraid of herself—afraid of what she might say to Maria's lover under such circumstances; so, after a few broken, but heartfelt words, she was silent.

And then George and the Mercer began to confer, in low tones, apart. To the Mercer's surprise, George had already been to consult with an eminent legal friend of the knight's; who had told him that, without going then into the question of guilt or innocence, there was one extremely important point



to discover as soon as possible : that point was the question of witnesses. Two were indispensable to the legal proof of an overt act of treason.

How many witnesses, he had asked, would be forthcoming against the Mercer ? If not more than two, could not one or both of them be persuaded to take a pleasant trip to the Continent for the good of their health ?

George and the Mercer discussed together what possible evidence might be forthcoming. But they could discover none of the directly compromising kind referred to by the counsel—that relating to overt act—except the visit to the masquerade, where it was possible there might have been spies who knew him.

But even there Sir Richard had scarcely shown his face.

Two things were at last decided. The first, that George should move heaven and earth to get for counsel an early sight of the depositions, so that he might discover what witnesses were to be feared ; and the second thing was, that George must show some sign of reality about the menial office so suddenly imposed upon him, and the Mercer therefore sat down to have his hair brushed, and his wig set to rights.

When the door was opened to bring in provisions, while an armed guide stood aside, the Mercer and

his man were accordingly seen engaged in this very domestic and untreasonable kind of business.

Nobody doubted from that hour that George Osborne (who had already made some little, but sufficient, change in his dress) was the knight's body servant; and before many days had passed there was no more popular person about the place than he.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE TWO WITNESSES.

LADY HERMIA was just setting out for the Tower, in hurried obedience to the Mercer's letter, when she saw a good-looking young fellow approach respectfully her carriage in the coach-yard, and beg to be permitted to speak with her.

The instant she knew from whom he came she descended from her coach, and went back into the house, bidding George to follow.

Her tone of sympathy in the distress of her friends warmed him into the expression of his feelings; and so it was soon understood what and who George really was—his master's friend rather than apprentice.

One important consequence was, that Lady Hermia spoke to George with a confidence and absence of the restraint of rank that were inexpressibly sweet.

"I am very, very glad you are here," she said, "for now I can explain myself, and avoid an act injurious to all parties. It is most important for

me, with reference to the interests of a gentleman well known to Mistress Christina ——”

“Pardon me, your ladyship, asking the question. Is it best, or not best for me to tell you what I know?”

“You mean you have heard of——”

“I have the honour, madam, to enjoy the acquaintance, and have had the privilege of being useful to General Langton, though I am no Jacobite!”

“Is it so? Is it so?” And while Lady Hermia’s eyes rested on the ingenuous, animated face of George, the tears gathered in the lids, and were beginning to fall. “Say then,” she continued, “that for *his* welfare, and for theirs, it is most desirable I should keep aloof just now, so that my intercession may not be damaged beforehand. The state of the king’s mind is terrible; and my father’s is as bad, or worse.”

“I will explain all this, your ladyship, to them; and I am sure it will comfort them to see how wisely you purpose to act.”

And then George ventured, with as much of tact as he could, to indicate to Lady Hermia the extreme importance of Sir Richard’s getting instantly either a copy of the depositions, or some trustworthy notion of the witnesses who were prepared to swear to the more important acts that were to be proved against the prisoners.

George did not show to Lady Hermia the vista along which his own eyes were glancing with so much of hope about these witnesses, but she was content to understand the matter was one literally of life and death ; and she undertook to obtain for him what he needed, if it were humanly possible for her or any one to do so.

And then they separated. George was to call once daily, at a certain hour ; and she indicated a particular door where her own maid should be always on the alert to receive him.

For six weary days in succession did he pass between the Tower and St. James's Square, with no reward for his long walks ; but on the seventh day he was met by the glad face of Seager at the door, who had taken a liking to the handsome serving-man, and smiled coquettishly at his every word of playful badinage.

He followed her eagerly up-stairs, where Lady Hermia was waiting for him in the saloon, and who advanced hurriedly to meet him.

“ My good George, do not stay now ; my father is here, and might question you. I have learned all you want to know. There are two, and only two, witnesses who can depose to acts that, if believed by the jury, would be fatal. Here are the names written down, and a brief memorandum of the essential facts they are prepared to swear to. Give

my kind regards to Sir Richard, and to Mistress Christina the tenderest love and sympathy. Tell her to place full trust in me, so far as I have power. Unhappily, I find my power at present less than I thought it was. Quick, now, my kind, good friend ! I want you away."

With a charming smile she put out her hand, which George, with profound respect, kissed, and then he hurried off, she saying,—

"Remember that one witness will not be enough for the prosecution. They must have two or fail ! But you will need money. Here are notes for five hundred pounds."

The very instant George got beyond the range of vision from the windows of the earl's house he drew forth the piece of paper, and read thus :

"The serious part of the evidence is that Sir Richard was present at the masquerade ; and, although that fact might by bare possibility be got over by Sir Richard's explanations and character, it would be suicidal to trust to such a conclusion in the face of a large amount of corroborative testimony against him, showing that Lord Langton lodged with him, and that the document discovered in the stick makes it so extremely probable that he knew and sanctioned the insurrection, if not even the murder.

"Two witnesses only can be found able and willing to depose to the especially criminating overt act—the appearance at the masquerade on the very night of the initiation of the murder and of the insurrection. These two witnesses are the men whose names are written on the other side." He turned the leaf, and read—

"CLARENCE HAEVEY.  
SCUM GOODMAN."

George's arms went up like those of a madman as he read the first name, and knew it meant Maria. And from that time how he moved along—whether walking or running—he knew not, so absorbed was he in the terrible anguish of this discovery.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE EMMA JANE.

GEORGE did not after all go to the Tower with his news. He had fortunately already prepared the Mercer for a sudden and unannounced departure ; while, therefore, he was madly sweeping along through the streets by the river towards Tower Hill, the thought struck him that it would be well for him not to tell Sir Richard and Christina of what he was about to do, lest he should fail ; and in failing compromise them, and perhaps by the attempt itself cause them to neglect efforts in other directions.

"No," thought he, "if I now disappear for a few days, while this business is going on, she, at least, will urge him to exert whatever influence he has ; and will no doubt herself urge on Lady Hermia. So be it. I resolve at once ; and now to begin."

And a curious beginning it was !

He went to the river below Wapping and began to study attentively the faces of the owners or captains of the smaller vessels, moored there, waiting for a cargo.



Presently he crossed a plank and got on board the *Emma Jane*, and offered his services.

The captain eyed him sharply, and asked him what he could do.

"Well, I candidly own I could bamboozle a revenue officer better than I could sail or steer this pretty craft in a storm."

"Had any experience that way?" asked the captain, with a wink and a leer. George repaid the wink and the leer with interest, and the captain proposed they should go down below.

"Is smuggling profitable just now?" asked George. "I didn't make much out of it before!"

"Oh, there's as fine fish in the sea as ever were taken out of it, if only one knew where to lay hand on 'em," said the captain.

"No doubt. But what say you, captain, to a speculation where the fish are already landed, the profit settled, payment sure and liberal?"

"For self and ship?" asked the captain.

"For self and ship!" re-echoed George.

"And how about cargo?"

"Say passengers," softly suggested George.

"Passengers, eh? That's the game. Rich folk, no doubt. Good reason for going, no doubt."

"Good pay, no doubt," said George, imitating with a laugh the captain's manner.

"Now, what may you fancy would be good pay-

for a craft like the *Emma Jane*? Aint she a beauty? bless her!"

"Yes, a beauty without paint!" said George, and the captain roared again at the satire, for the *Emma Jane* certainly was showing the colour of her timbers, and her need for a new and ornamental skin.

"Well, now," continued the captain, "for a choice sloop like this, and for an experienced captain like me, what should you say would be good pay?"

"Supposing you are kept waiting about a few days to begin with, then out and home on the voyage, say another week, what should you say to a hundred pounds?"

"Couldn't afford it!" said the captain. "There's character to think of."

"Well, at how much do you value your character?" asked George.

"Why, it 'ud be dog-cheap at the whole hundred pounds."

"Ah, that indeed!" said George, gravely. "You think so. Well, you ought to know. But what a fine character yours must be! Goodness knows, if I wanted to sell mine I couldn't get a gold Jacobus for it, if such a coin be left in the country."

"Any risk in the job?"

"A little. We musn't be caught."

"Shall you be with us?"

"Yes; I and the other gentleman, who is also a broken-down gentleman, and a very amusing sort of fellow in his way, though quarrelsome in his cups."

"Well, I'm not nice as to a bit of danger, particularly when I'm joined by a plucky fellow like yourself—a clever fellow, too!"

"Stop! I know you are going to make me pay for these compliments! Is that fair? Charge me for a beautiful character damaged if you like; charge me for an additional stain or two upon the fair cheek of *Emma Jane*; charge me for risk; but don't charge me because I am clever and plucky? Eh?"

"Say two hundred guineas, and I'm your man."

"And you'll carry off for that sum any body I bring you?"

"Ay, and without axing him the question whether he likes to go, if you choose."

"That's the sort of spirit, my noble captain. Not that this gentleman will be brought on board by any kind of compulsion. If he comes he will come of his own free will."

"At a price?" suggested the sly captain.

"At a price," responded George. "And, as he's a determined gambler, you and he may pass your time very pleasantly."

"Ah!" ejaculated the captain, with a great deal of unction in the tone.

"But when he does come on board, and says he is willing to go, then he mustn't be allowed to alter his mind—you know!"

"Exactly."

"Now then," said George, "let's break a sixpence, and the matter's settled; we shall have pledged faith to each other."

The coin was broken, and the bargain settled.

"You'll have to keep yourself and the charming *Emma Jane* ready at all hours of the day and night."

"Put it down as part of the bargain, and then you know where I am, and how to have me."

"What hands have you on board?"

"Not enough. I shall get more."

"Would more help you, if it comes to a race?"

"Of course they would! *Emma Jane* has been a smartish jade in her time, and can go at a spanking rate still, provided you only tell her you mean to get everything out of her she's capable of."

"Very well. Spare nothing that can increase speed; and when all's over, if the affair is a success, I will guarantee something extra to pay for all odds and ends—new or mended sails, etc."

One part of George's scheme was thus happily

settled, but its value was absolutely dependent on the success of the other part, the persuading Scum Goodman to go. How was he to be dealt with? No doubt he could be bribed, but unfortunately he had not, like the captain, a character even to sell, his was so bad in money matters.

"Nice thing it would be for the Mercer," said George to himself, "if the vagabond first takes a good lot of money from me, and then goes to the government to bring them that additional evidence of the Mercer's guilt—his attempt to corrupt a witness's honesty."

Meantime where was Scum Goodman? In vain did George track him from one ale-house, inn, and tavern to another by the odour of his character. In vain did he plunge into the vilest haunts and neighbourhoods, and come into contact with scenes of vice that made his young blood thrill with horror and disgust. In vain did he hang about the gambling-houses, for even there he was told that no one could imagine what had become of him.

"Of course! Of course! What a dull ass I have been!" suddenly exclaimed George, in a fit of enlightenment. "The government are taking care of their witness. Of course! They have most likely got him under lock and key, and there's an end to my precious scheme!"

Pondering over the whole subject, it struck him

that it might be worth while to visit the private home of the Chief of the Secret Service; and accordingly he took an apartment just opposite the Chief's house, which he watched hour by hour from behind the shelter of a window curtain. A greater part of two days were thus spent without profit. Three times had he seen the Chief go in and come out; when, on the morning of the second day, George saw him do what he had not done before, turn his head and glance for a single moment at a certain window.

"That's the room—sure as I'm a sinner! There's my man—but forbidden to come to the window up-stairs, unluckily!"

He scribbled a few words on paper, and read them afterwards to himself, thus;—

"Some old friends of yours—*not* politicians—hang them all say I—no, but right good jolly dogs—six bottle men—lots of blunt, lasses, cards, dice—and all that sort of thing, are going to have a carouse in a new neighbourhood. Won't you come? Your Chief—amiable man!—need not be a bit the wiser, if you slip out and have a turn with us, and then slip back. We'll keep you sober! Trust us! Just won't we? My hand shakes, so a friend writes for me.

"N.B.—Can lend you a little—to sport with—if you're stripped bare."

This precious document George signed with the name of a man he had often heard of in his search, as being quite a crony of Scum Goodman's. He rolled a stone up in the paper, and twisted it tight.

Armed with this implement he went down into

the street, passed slowly by the house once without venturing to do anything, for he saw people who might see him.

Returning, with still slower footsteps, he caught a favourable moment, and sent his missile right at the window. Down came the broken glass rattling on the pavement, but down did *not* come the instrument of the mischief.

George rejoiced in heart, and returned instantly to his lodging to watch. After a long time—so long that he thought Scum Goodman was not there, or if he was, that he would not come—George, to his intense delight, saw a window below the window with the broken glass open, and a man put one leg outside, then the other, then lower the window and walk sharply off.

George's rapid footstep behind was heard by the fugitive. He turned, as if accustomed to guard himself in that direction.

"I have the pleasure to see Mr. Goodman, I believe?" said George.

The gentleman addressed measured George doubtfully from top to toe, but did not reply.

"Our mutual friend in whose behalf I wrote that letter——"

"Oh, *you* wrote it, did you?"

And Scum Goodman took George's arm, and walked away with him as if he were an old friend.

After a very long walk the two men entered an ale-house, and went, to Scum Goodman's astonishment, into a small and empty parlour. Where was his friend? he asked.

"I am your friend," said George, hardily.

"You!"

"Yes. Try me. You are in danger!"

"Danger!"

"Ay, terrible danger! You are a Jacobite. You have turned informer, and you expect to escape, perhaps be rewarded besides—eh? Isn't that true?"

Scum Goodman's eyes rolled about in astonishment that this young fellow should know so much that was certainly true, and that he should prophesy a danger of which Scum Goodman had all along had a sort of nervous fear.

"You don't deny, so I am not far wrong," said George. Now mark! I know that that diabolical Chief of the Secret Service means to have you made away with as soon as the dirty work is over. When you have helped to convict an innocent man—Sir Richard Constable—you will be apparently set free, and then you are to fall into the hands of justice for some other matter—some trumped-up charge, perhaps—and then it'll be quick work: you'll be hanged out of the way, or slipped off for life to the colonies as a convict slave!"

Scum Goodman's once handsome face became



horribly distorted in the double attempt to laugh off the story, and yet to consider it anxiously, as if it might be true.

"I suppose you did not bring me out on a fool's errand, or from pure love of me, to say all this?" he asked.

"No," responded George. "I want to see whether you hadn't better try to save life than to take it, supposing—always, I say, supposing—that the one course should be as profitable and as safe as the other."

"Well, as to the profit," said Scum Goodman, "I don't reckon much of that. They have got the whip hand of me. I was caught red-handed, as one may say, and they can send me to the gallows when they please. Naturally, when they put the alternative before me—to give evidence against others, or have evidence given against myself—I chose the pleasanter way; but I have no devotion to the deed, I can tell you. I was born and bred a gentleman."

"Any one can see that," remarked George; "and I am proud to have formed your acquaintance. But now to business. What should you say if I took you to a vessel all ready for departure, well manned, and quite capable of setting you on the coast of France in a very short time—what should you say to that?"

"All very fine, my youngster; but how am I to live abroad? Who'll trust me there?"

"Suppose that the instant you embarked, fifty guineas were ready for you; fifty more when you landed on the coast of France; and fifty a month for two months afterwards, making in all two hundred?"

Scum Goodman's watery and bloodshot eyes sparkled with something of their old light and vivacity, as if he saw all the bright coin, and the glow from them was reflected back on his own cheek. Still he was silent, wary, thoughtful. So George added:

"Suppose you go with a captain who likes cards, and has got—or will get—another two hundred guineas? Eh! Think of the sport!"

Scum Goodman got up, and tried to move about in the small room, as if to warm his feet and cool his head.

"Well," said George, "I have shot my last arrow; and if that doesn't hit the mark, let's call for the bill, pay the reckoning, and go back to the amiable Chief."

"You are prepared to do all this at once, if I consent?" said Scum Goodman, at last.

"Come with me, before you decide, and I'll show you the vessel," said George. "She's close by. Mind, a handsome-looking craft wouldn't suit us;

a smart, rakish-looking, and obviously fast vessel wouldn't do at all. But she's a capital jade—this *Emma Jane*—for our job!”

Scum Goodman went to look at the vessel, though, being dark, he could see very little of her; but he saw the captain, who was prepared to be very genial, sat down with him to a game of cards, won a guinea or two, looked at the berth proposed, and finally consented to go abroad for the good of George's friends.

“Up with the sails!” shouted the captain; and before Scum Goodman had time to take second thought, the *Emma Jane* was gliding down, with a favourable wind and tide, towards Gravesend.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### DANGER AHEAD !

GEORGE had so skilfully timed his movements, that it was precisely at midnight the vessel started. He and the captain played admirably into each other's hands. George plied Scum Goodman with drink, and flattery, and jokes, and the captain continued to lose small sums of money to him at cards.

While they are congratulating themselves on the darkness of the night, and the secrecy and success with which they have left their moorings, and passed through a good deal of the pool, we must go back for a day or two, to a time when George was vainly hunting up his prey.

The captain, after breaking the sixpence, and after George's departure, began to reflect on his bargain. It struck him that two hundred guineas was, after all, a shabby price for the sort of service he was most likely about to render.

Still he did not like to dispute his bargain, in order to enhance the price. *That* struck him as mean and dishonourable.

But having got thus far, what could be more

natural than that loyalty itself should suggest to him the idea that perhaps the secret job might be worth even more than two hundred guineas to the government to know of!

The more he thought that idea over the better he liked it. Still, it was not until the afternoon of the very day when George brought the mysterious passenger, that he decided to break faith, on the ground of his duty as a good subject of King William.

He had a slight knowledge of the son of the Earl of Bridgeminster, who was fond of the water, and of sailors, and of everything connected with them.

To him he went and told the whole story, and was promised the most liberal rewards, praised for his patriotism, and sent back with the injunction to act precisely as he had intended, and take no sort of notice of anybody or anything else.

That was an immense relief to the captain's mind, who saw that he might thereafter swear he had kept his contract, and he knew nothing as to the cause of failure, if failure should be.

The instant the captain had gone, the young nobleman went to his father, and repeated the story to him, both of them taking for granted it was General Langton who was thus about to take flight.

Lord Cecil begged his father to leave the matter in his hands. He had, as the earl knew, the swiftest

yacht yet launched by English builders. He would put extra men on board, a small piece of ordnance, run down the river at once to some distance, so as to be quite beyond the *Emma Jane*, and there wait for her, just as if they were going to press mariners.

And so at the very moment that George and Scum Goodman were first getting into conversation near the Chief's house, Lord Cecil's yacht was passing the *Emma Jane*; and if the captain of the latter noticed the incident, he took care to have nothing to say about it even to his own men.

Scum Goodman is already half drunk before they reach Woolwich, where there is a frigate of which George and the captain have great dread; in case any knowledge of their doings should have oozed out, and the men be there waiting to put a sudden stop to their expedition.

With great jubilation, the captain says to George,—

“There! that's passed! And I take it if anybody was watching, they'd think Woolwich quite far enough to give us play!”

“Ay; but don't shout till you are out of the wood,” said George. “There's Gravesend yet, you know, and the block-house with its armed guard. If, indeed, we pass that, then I too will cry Jubilee!”

Scum Goodman continued to drink and continued to play, but it was wonderful how little the drink affected his play. The captain at the outset, in a cunning spirit, had determined to lose, and did lose ; but he was nettled to find that now, when he had decided to win, he couldn't manage it except by cheating, which he dared not venture in the faces of the two men.

So he went on losing his gold and his temper in pretty equal proportions, till the temper became so predominant as almost to unfit him to play at all.

As they approached Gravesend, George drew the captain from the cards, surprised at his reluctance to leave them at a moment so critical.

"We are about to pass the block-house ; it's just coming into sight."

The captain and George then walked the deck together—the former irritable and mysterious, the latter anxious, and supposing the conduct of the captain was also the consequence of a similar anxiety.

No challenge from the block-house arrested them, and George whispered,—

"All's right—we are safe !"

The captain thought so too, and with secret wonder ; for if any force were prepared to arrest the fugitives, surely it would have been displayed before this.

"Let's us have that hamper out," shouted George.

The hamper was unpacked, and a goodly table spread with roast beef, mince pies, and wine; and George, radiant with delight at seeing his hazardous mission thus finally successful, had risen, glass in hand, to give his first toast, saying,—

"I won't give you the toast that was so long uppermost in my heart, "To the success of our expedition, for it *has* succeeded, but——"

The toast died away on his lips unuttered, and his face lost suddenly all its ruddy glow and animation, and sense of satiric enjoyment of the characters of the men around him, for a sailor put his head down the hatchway, and bawled out,—

"There's a swift vessel just put forth from Tilbury, and it's gaining fast upon us!"

In an instant the feasters were upon their legs, dismay in every face.

The captain ran on deck; George followed. Scum Goodman collected his earnings, and then began to think of his precious life, now more in danger than ever.

He ran about, eagerly examining every vacant space and corner like a rat whose hole has been stopped.

George soon rejoined him, saying,—

"There's a lot of gravel for ballast in the hold; scoop yourself out a place. Don't be afraid. If



they don't discover you, they discover nothing. I don't think any of them are likely to know or suspect me, except in connection with you."

"But the captain?" urged Scum Goodman.

"Has promised me silence. Besides, he's mixed up, and must be silent. Quick, then!"

Scum Goodman soon wriggled himself into the gravel in the darkest part of the hold; and managed so to dispose of an empty sack that it covered loosely the exposed part of his face, without suggesting anything more than that it was a sack thrown there to lie till wanted.

George returned to the deck to help the captain in any measures requisite for their safety, and was much disturbed to find him losing heart, predicting failure, and lamenting he had ever listened to the scheme.

"Come, come, my friend," said George; "have courage, at all events, to protect ourselves now. There's no real danger. Your tale's ready, and so is mine. I am quitting the service of a master I don't like, and taking advantage of my knowledge of you to get a cheap trip to Holland, where I have relatives."

"Very good," said the captain, with a sardonic sneer. "Tell them that, for here they are."

Lord Cecil, at the head of a party of armed men, now boarded the *Emma Jane*; and, warning the

crew they were the king's prisoners, he had the hatches taken up, and went below, casting a glance at George in passing, as if to say, "Who are you? We'll attend to you presently," but too much interested in General Langton's whereabouts to stop to dally with meaner instruments.

The cabin was empty; the lockers were all rigorously examined, but no General Langton appeared.

Lord Cecil desired to spare the exposure of the captain in accordance with a well-known rule of State policy; but while he was hesitating as to what he should do, one of his men got into the hold, and cried, laughingly, to his comrades:

"I shall try to sharpen my sword in a new fashion."

And he began to thrust his weapon into the gravel right up to the hilt, first in one place, then in another, travelling the while nearer and nearer to the concealed fugitive.

Scum Goodman heard those alarming sounds—once—twice—thrice! and the last thrust seemed so near him that nature could stand no more; so comforting himself that his evidence was still his evidence, and precious to the Government, he determined to risk no longer the neighbourhood of that dangerous blade.

"Avast there!" he shouted, throwing the sack aside. "Can't a gentleman lie down for a nap but

he must be spitted through, as if you were going to roast and eat him?"

And so, with as good a grace as he could assume, he came forth, and gave himself up; and, of course, in doing so, sacrificed George, whose true position was at once understood, as the daring criminal, and, no doubt, desperate traitor, who was carrying off one of His Majesty's most valued witnesses.

Lord Cecil, when he had got over the first disappointment about General Langton, was not inclined to undervalue the prey he had caught.

As to George he presented an undaunted front; and when they put the irons on him and on Scum Goodman—irons for both hands and feet—and linked them together, he only laughed, and said to Scum Goodman in consolation:

"Tell them I kidnapped you before you knew what I was about. Tell them that, and then offer to swear all the harder, and you'll see it will all be right."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### ROBBING THE SCAFFOLD.

GEORGE's failure to carry off Scum Goodman was fatal to the Mercer's cause. Every one believed that he must have acted under Sir Richard's directions; and thus his supposed desire to escape prejudiced him in the minds of all the timid and the cruel, who, unhappily, were the vast majority. He was tried, convicted, condemned to death.

George was also tried and convicted, but condemned only to prolonged imprisonment; for it was believed that being still in point of age a minor—and the act itself done in pure devotion to his master—he was therefore entitled, in the absence of any evidence of Jacobite opinions and tendencies, to indulgent treatment.

Christina's name had been quietly dropped out of the proceedings, and she had been given to understand she was free, while allowed to remain in the Tower with her father.

The Aldermen and Common Council of London sent up a deputation to the Government to ask for clemency.

They were introduced not to the king as they had asked, but to the Earl of Bridgeminster—who received them most politely. But as the deputation had not faith enough or boldness enough to assert their belief in Sir Richard's innocence, they were soon shown they had no case; and that they had better return to their constituents and families, and exert themselves to diffuse sentiments of loyalty among the citizens who had so disgraced themselves by electing a Jacobite alderman.

To Christina's passionate appeals to Lady Hermia, the latter responded by similar appeals to her father; but that worthy nobleman found himself quite able to repel all such appeals, while keeping up a show of decorous human and parental feeling.

But Lady Hermia could not thus answer Christina; and her life became a daily struggle—a daily torture.

And all the while, the shadow of a still greater calamity seemed to hang over her in General Langton's danger.

She had heard nothing from him, neither had Christina, though there had been ample time and opportunities for him to have communicated with one or both, even if he had to write from abroad.

The Earl of Bridgeminster and his valet were now again in frequent consultation; and the result was soon shown in the variety and ingenuity of the

arrangements of the household, to prevent Lady Hermia knowing what was passing in the world without.

Thus, on a certain day—one too full of anguish for us to venture to dwell on its details—the Mercer found himself separated from Christina, who, he believed, was dying, while he also believed he was left to his fate by Lady Hermia without one last word or interview.

Again the scaffold was erected on Tyburn, and again were great multitudes present. But the change in the tone and feeling of the people this time was remarkable. There was a wide-spread belief in the innocence of Sir Richard. It was thought that personal friendship, in return for past benefits derived from the Langton family, had been the only crime. He was a popular man, besides.

The silence was awful when the condemned man appeared on the scaffold beside the executioner—the only victim of the day.

“Hats off! Hats off! Shame! You are hanging an innocent man!” shouted the crowd.

The Mercer heard that, and advanced to the front, and said—

“My dear countrymen, that which some among you have said is true—I am innocent! I am going before an awful tribunal. I will not go with a lie in my mouth; therefore I say I am innocent alike of

the intended murder and the insurrection. His Majesty!—bless him!—has been deceived in this. Tell him my last words were an appeal to you to cry with me, ‘God save and protect this nation, and protect King William to reign over it!’”

The tumult at this appeal became greater than ever.

And then the tumult seemed to be reflected back to the scaffold where figures were moving strangely about, and where the condemned man seemed himself at a loss to understand what was going on.

Soon it became whispered through the crowd that there must have been a reprieve. In an instant there broke forth the most tremendous uproar ever made by human voices and heard by human ears of—

“Reprieve! Reprieve!”

“He is reprieved! See, they are leading him down! Hurrah! Hurrah!”

Again the multitude caught up the shouts, and sent it reverberating far and wide.

Meantime, what was Sir Richard doing—what suffering—what enjoying?

He and the sheriff are together in an enclosed space below the scaffold. The first words of the sheriff show him the bitterness of death has not passed:

“I have received a communication of a very pain-

ful and anxious nature. It is this: I am placed at liberty to stay your execution, and take you back to the Tower; but bound also to inform you that your execution is only postponed for seven days in order to see whether you are willing to render to the Government whatever help you can in atonement for the crimes you have committed. That is my message. I felt it was impossible to discuss it with you on the scaffold. It came but now; so judge whether I have not done with you as you wish to be done by in postponing the execution, and giving you new chances for life."

"It is impossible," said the agitated Mercer, "but that I should thank you for such an act, but I grieve to say it is one that I cannot profit by. I know what it means. The Government thinks I can help them to entrap General Langton. I cannot; I would not if I could!"

"Well, Sir Richard, your danger is over for the day. I have acted, and cannot undo my act. As a friend and well-wisher, I beg you to consider seriously what you do."

"I can do no less—I will do no less; and I thank you," said the agitated Mercer.

Two days out of the seven days have passed. They have revived the life blood in Christina's cheeks, for if her father has once escaped from the



very scaffold itself, it is impossible, she believes, that men with human hearts can send him there a second time.

Sir Richard gently strives to check this delusion, for it is a delusion. He believes that the irritation against him will be so great if he persists in refusing, or seeming to refuse, to betray his friend, that they will be rather pleased than otherwise to inflict a double punishment in thus hanging him twice.

And then comes the reaction to Christina's hope and confidence, and she sinks so low that the physician Lady Hermia sends to her warns Sir Richard she will die unless relieved.

Then at last the heart of the stout Mercer gives way, and, for the first time, he begins to dally with the thought :

"What can I do, not *too* bad, to give this Government an inkling of what they ask, and satisfy them that I have told all I know ?"

And while thus thinking, he and Christina have the following conversation :

"Teena, darling, do you feel able to listen to me calmly, if I speak of possibilities even yet ?"

Teena was lying as if in a trance on her father's bed in the dungeon, but she heard him, and sat up, with feverish, scarlet cheeks, and her bright eyes glittering like stars.

"Well, darling, if I were to tell them all I know

and all I suspect about—about persons who are compromised in the Jacobite plot, they might think the information, such as it is, sufficient to entitle me to claim the reward they offer me—my life; which, for me, now means your life, Teena.”

“Is it something that is merely painful, unpleasant, shocking to have to do, but not dishonourable, not—not wicked?”

“I must answer you candidly?”

“Yes.”

“I fear that it would make me for ever infamous?”

“Then who dares propose it to you?” said Christina, rising to her feet. “Are we not miserable enough already without this dreadful aggravation?”

“But, Teena, darling, life is sweet.”

“For me, papa, or you?”

“For both of us.”

“Would it be sweet in infamy?”

“Bless thee, darling!—no, no! I did but try thee. Let them fetch me when they please, I know now what to say: I will tell them that even my little maiden of seventeen—my sweet, unsullied flower, just about to open, and show the world its consummate beauty—even she laughs at the cruel greybeards, and bids them do their worst.”

## CHAPTER XIX.

SIRE, HAVE I FULFILLED MY PROMISE ?

AGAIN is the royal exile at Paris receiving a visitor—one who has ventured all in his behalf, and who now comes to receive his reward, even in failure, through the gratitude of a prince who knows that man proposes, but that it is Heaven who disposes.

The very first face General Langton looks on as he enters the courtyard gives him a foretaste of what is to come. It is that of the bulky porter—a Jacobite and politician to the core—who scowls now where he once had fawned and smiled.

Within the house General Langton meets a second face, which is equally expressive in a more courtly way, without being in the least degree less irritatingly painful. The Marquis of Burford meets him at the entrance of the saloon outside the door, offers no hand to be shaken, but says, with a sneer of exquisite polish :

“I congratulate you, my lord, on your personal

safety, while so many brave gentlemen are being done to death."

"Yes," said General Langton, seeming to accept the congratulation as sincerely offered, "I have been carried safe through many dangers. Where is the king?"

"Oh, he, too, waits to congratulate you! And if he asks inconvenient questions as to what you have done with the means, friends, opportunities placed at your disposal, you must not be too hard upon him; for when a man's house is tumbling about his ears, he doesn't care much for the eloquence of the architect who was going to make all so pleasant for him."

"My lord marquis, I am not here to quarrel with you."

"Quarrel! I! With our great benefactor!—the man who has won even the admiration of King William; and who may ere long be able to lend us all a helping hand to get us another berth! Quarrel with him! Hardly!"

The marquis turned on his heel, opened the door, and walked into the room, seemingly quite careless as to whether General Langton followed or not.

The general bit his lip through in checking the fury that possessed him; but he knew all dignity would be compromised and lost if now he allowed himself to be drawn into a bitter, wrangling, wordy

war. He had work in hand, that was too seriously important to his own future happiness to risk a brawl leading probably to a duel, while it was possible to direct the interview into safer channels.

"So, my lord," said the harsh voice of King James, who stood moveless to receive General Langton, vouchsafing neither movement, nor smile, nor courtesy of any kind, "you bring me back yourself, I see. Our friends are being slaughtered; our generous ally, the King of France, is disbanding the army he had gathered for our support; the last gleam of hope for the ruined but noble cause I represent you have buried for ever; but let us be thankful you are spared! It is a great mercy. Would only we knew *how* to show you our boundless gratitude!"

"Sire, have I fulfilled my promise?"

"What promise, sir?" said the king, stung, as if with an adder, by the recoil of his own poisoned sting, when he found the intended victim tossed it aside with manly fortitude.

"I gave your majesty my pledge that even if I failed in rendering to the cause the services hoped, I would at least present myself to you here, in token of my honest devotion and fidelity. I am here!"

"Yes; and I only wish that you were not here; whilst I must see in you the man who has so managed

matters as to send my best and bravest to die on the usurper's scaffold. It would have been well for your reputation, my lord, had you then died too !”

“ Ah, yes, your majesty, that is true ! I feel that is indeed true ! And were my life my own, to play with as I please, I should desire no pleasure more exquisite than that you would allow your marquis here, who thinks it a fine thing to insult the unfortunate because they are unfortunate—I say I should be transported with a lover's ecstasy of feeling if he and any others like him would take their swords, and fight the quarrel out with me in regular succession till I might fall at last !”

“ Well, sir, what more business have you with us ?”

“ Again to demand—Have I fulfilled my pledge ?”

“ You are here, certainly ; but how know I what convenient arrangements you have made before crossing the water ? My Lord Langton, I am ill and wearied to death at the very sight of you. Go, and take with you——”

“ Sire, by this language and behaviour you depose yourself before even I was prepared to depose you from my heart, my duties, my loyalty ! King of mine no longer—pretender by the best of rights—the right of mockery and unreality of all kinds—I throw back upon you your black ingratitude ; and I confess now humbly, before all, my great offence

that I thought England might be governed by such a man. Prince, farewell! I bear a sword, but it will be used to defend myself in future from my 'friends;' and I go to offer it in determined loyalty to my 'enemies.' Again, farewell!"

"Shall I stab him, or shoot him down?" hissed the marquis. "I will with as little reck as if he were a dog. If one can't do it, there are plenty here——"

"Hush, my lord! Let the traitor villain go!"

General Langton turned when he had reached the door, and paused; and then there came back upon him a vivid sense of all that his father had done for that man—of all the sacrifices of place, fortune, rank, he and his father had alike made; and the retrospect, instead of embittering him, caused him to retrace his steps a few paces, and to say, in a voice that trembled with emotion:

"What I have said I shall never unsay; but oh, sir, ere it be too late, think of what the world—of what England—of what Louis, will say, who now waits, he tells me, to receive me with open arms, to tell me, so he says, that he is more moved with my failure than with many men's successes!"

"You go to join him?" demanded the king, after a long and painful pause.

"No."

"Of course not!" said the marquis, aloud.

"No," repeated General Langton. "I go back to England to seek for pardon and——"

"I understand. You need not finish your sentence. My dear marquis, I am feeble—will you lend me your arm?"

The marquis came to him, the king rested his hand on the offered shoulder, both turned, and slowly walked away, not even casting a single glance at the disgraced emissary, who stood there half incredulous.

After a prolonged pause, during which he took a kind of morbid pleasure in watching the retreating figures as long as it was possible to keep them in sight, he smiled, and said:

"I wrong them! Yes. How could they give me greater cause of gratitude than to show me now, before I finally break with them, how perfectly contemptible they are! And this is the god I worshipped? Dupe!

"And now, dear England, thou shalt be mine once more; and do what thou likest with me. Death or pardon will be about equally welcome after this!"



## CHAPTER XX.

### OUTSIDE.

THE Earl of Bridgeminster's house became, at a certain period, the subject of a peculiar kind of surveillance, quite unconsciously to its inmates.

In the daytime all went on as usual; but when twilight began, there issued from among the thin stream of passers-by one man who, each evening, managed to get close to every one of the windows on the ground floor, and peer in. Then he would be missing for a few minutes, and would re-appear at the window of a room opposite, in a large mansion at the opposite corner then unlet, and having no tenant but the aged constable and his wife who showed the place.

This kind of thing went on for several nights without any kind of change other than that he was often interrupted, but always seemed to manage not only to avoid being looked at closely, but to evade suspicion.

But this was by no means the most extraordinary part of the affair.

While he watched the earl's house, it really seemed as though somebody else watched him.

There was a street crossing very near, and a young, handsome-looking, but pale and dirty-faced lad stood there with his broom, and made the way clean, and asked for a copper in reward.

He got not only coppers but silver. The lad was so handsome, and so saucy if any one stopped to speak to him and enter into genial conversation, that people found their hearts and their pockets alike open together to him.

But this lad, while so busy with his broom, with his begging, and his audacious humour, never for one instant lost sight of that dim figure, from the moment it emerged from the crowd.

If the figure went round towards the rear of the mansion, the street-sweeper was sure to be seen skipping along in the same direction too, as if in pure gaiety of heart, or perhaps to warm his feet in the cold April evenings.

It was remarkable also that when that figure crossed the well-swept path the sweeper never once asked alms from it, nor spoke to it, nor even looked at it; but, on the contrary, was sure to be interested in something or somebody in quite a different direction.

The figure never noticed those sharp glances, strange to say; though it seemed wonderfully sensi-

tive to glances from every other direction, and from all other sorts of people.

The figure generally disappeared after a few minutes of this kind of surveillance, but only to reappear an hour or so later, just as if he dreaded that the being seen for too many minutes at a time hovering about in the same spot might of itself mark him out from the crowd, and so destroy his coveted object—absolute immunity from being known or watched.

He would then go away, and come back again as many as three or four times in a single night, till his last disappearance; which was only when the lights were extinguished in the earl's house, usually very late.

When a sedan-chair or a carriage drove up to the porch, the figure and the sweeper became at once more guarded and more watchful than ever. The figure would shrink back into the darkest recesses of the wall, and from thence gaze with intense vision on the inmates, while shunning even their most casual glances.

Once, when a sedan was borne up, the figure seemed moved to a change of purpose. It came forth a little from the obscurity, advanced one pace—then another—and then suddenly turned off at an angle leading in quite another direction, and passed away.

Was the figure thus influenced by its own doubts

and hesitations, or by obstacles that it had only then discovered through its advancing so near to the chair?

The figure came only, as we have said, in the shade of evening and in the darkness of night. But not so the street-sweeper. It was a marvel how he ate, or slept, or rested, for he was always at the crossing—always on the watch, so it seemed, for some secret purpose of his own, with which purpose that figure and that lofty mansion were obviously connected.

At times the lad seemed to stand himself lost in gloomy doubt; wondering, perhaps, whether the figure was conscious of being watched, and therefore took no other step than that of paying these nightly visits.

Anyhow, the lad seemed to grow brighter, sharper, more unsleeping as night after night passed on without result. If the figure did know of the lad's doings, it seemed hopeless for it to think to throw him off his guard by mere tediousness of delay.

One night, about eleven o'clock, when the streets were swept by such furious gusts of wind and such literal fountains of water as to make the street-sweeper's vocation unnecessary, the lad seemed most happily unconscious of any inconvenience, and stood there to be drenched with wonderful, almost angelic patience.

And just as he had fancied might happen in such

a night, the figure chose that wild and wayward season to bring to an end the system of watching by something more venturous.

He went straight into the little courtyard of the earl's house, as if to pay a formal visit, and disappeared.

Within a few seconds the lad was standing at the gate, panting for breath, gazing after that figure till he could see it no more on account of an intervening wall.

Then he threw the broom up high into the air, and with a wild cry, that still was not loud, said :

“ At last ! at last ! ”

## CHAPTER XXI.

### INSIDE.

THE figure passed into the courtyard, and glided instantly to the nearest wall for covert.

It was dark, but not so dark as to prevent any eye that happened to look across the place from seeing the movement—if any such eye happened to look.

Moving along the wall, the figure came to a wide opening—the coach-house. Pausing there, to listen for any sounds near him, or for footsteps, the figure presently stepped across a little pathway of light, that came from an open door leading into the house.

It was too small to be anything more than a servant's entrance. The figure boldly ventured in, moved on with rapid but silent step, till he saw a passage to the right and left, and well lighted in both directions.

Stopping just a single pace before reaching that diverging space, the figure listened; and, on the whole, seemed to like the sounds that came from the left—of music and laughter—better than those

from the right, where some matronly voice seemed to be scolding the cook for the failure of a dish that had been ordered for "my lord's supper."

The passage taken by the figure led him straight into the stately hall, the very place he seemed to have avoided when choosing so humble a mode of entrance.

With quick decision, the figure moved on towards the grand staircase; but stopped, listened, heard footsteps above, and retreated to the shelter of a vast statue of the Laocoon, occupying one of the sides of the superb hall.

It was the earl and his son who descended the staircase, and the former was saying to the latter, in answer to some question :

"No, not yet; but we are sure of him!"

They had to pass the Laocoon: and had they turned as they did so, they must have seen an addition to the sculpture that would have surprised them. But they were too much engrossed in their talk to do other than go straight on, into a room on the ground floor.

Swift as a shadow moves under the influence of a flying cloud, did the figure move away from the statue, and up the staircase to the first landing, where it saw rather than heard another figure approaching—that of the earl's valet, going in his noiseless, gliding way to the earl's chamber, to have

his nightly gossip with his master while undressing him.

Was the intruder, then, hopelessly caught ?

He stepped into a little closet that opened from the landing, conscious that he must have been seen, if the valet had looked straight before him.

Inside that closet he stood, prepared as for a death grapple, if the valet opened the door.

He did not; thinking, probably, nothing of the incident, as the servants had at times business there.

Again the figure emerged into the light and reached the upper floor; and there was compelled to pause, and wonder which of all these splendid chambers it would be safest to venture.

One of them appeared to the figure, after long and intense listening, as if it might be rather a dressing-room than a bed-chamber, judging of it by the ground-glass window that, for some reason or other, had been inserted in the door—probably through deficiency of light in the front, where were many stately Corinthian pillars and a portico.

He stepped softly to it, bent his head, seemed satisfied, tried the handle, opened the door without noise, and then again breathlessly paused, with the handle in his hand.

He thought once he heard a quick gasp, as for breath, within; but concluded it was merely an accidental sound produced by the wind, which was



piping all sorts of melancholy tunes about the great house.

Some inexplicable fear at this—probably the last step he might have to take, compelled him to pause, as if for courage, for resolution, for faith. He moved the door slowly back, and gazed in. No one was there. That was a great relief.

But he saw another door inside. It was open, and had a great light, as of many wax tapers, issuing from it.

He saw in the room where he was a bath. He saw pictures on the walls. Rapidly he took in their character: they were sweet, pure, ideal—not earthly, “sensual, devilish,” like so many of the so-called works of art, hung in aristocratic bed-chambers.

In another direction, appeared a cabinet of marquetry work, and near it he beheld what his eyes had yearned for—traces of womanly neighbourhood in the riding-habit, hung gracefully over a lofty, straight-backed chair.

“Can this be the place?” the figure seemed to be asking itself, as if preparatory to one yet more daring step than any he had achieved.

He straightened himself, as if to brace up his whole frame, breathed a short prayer to Heaven to guide him rightly and happily through, and then went on into the larger room, and into the full blaze of the light.

A lady, who had just begun to undress, and whose long hair was falling in exquisite beauty round her neck started to her feet with a half-uttered shriek.

“Hermia!”

“General Langton!”

She had risen to her feet, in her first alarm, unconscious of the falling drapery; then, recollecting herself, with her neck suffused with blushes, she fell back into her chair and drew her clothes round her, and fastened them by crossing her arms upon her breast; and then, with dignity, she waited, breathlessly gazing upon him.

“Hermia!” he said, in agitated accents—for the sense of the wondrous beauty of his wife mingled inevitably with all the deeper and darker thoughts of their position—“Hermia, at last I come to you!”

“To me!” she said, in accents and with a tone that left it a matter of extreme doubt in what spirit she was prepared to receive him.

“Yes,” he said. “I have but now returned from St. Germain, where I have fulfilled to the letter the mission I undertook. I pledged myself, many months ago, that I would see the leading men of our party, test the chances of a successful insurrection, promote it, if I saw sufficient reasons, and if not, then I would go back to him and resign all further con-

nection with the Stuart cause! I failed, and have said so, and have had my reward. I did put my faith in princes, and I am justly punished!"

"Oh, the ingrate! Mind him not! And have you really resigned his ill-omened service? Have you done that, Robert?" eagerly questioned the Lady Hermia.

"I have. I have utterly, and for ever, renounced my allegiance! Nay, I have let them know I was quite prepared thenceforward to offer my sword to the reigning monarch—to your king, Hermia—who shall henceforth be mine, if he will accept my services!"

"Oh, he will—he must! But, oh, my own dear husband—if I dare call you so—we must not deceive ourselves. Your danger is great. The king is actuated by the bitterest feelings towards you, it is a part of his character to dislike men who render him very great service—unless he happen to want them. I am sorry to say it—but it is true. Nor can I deny that my own father is the king's chief adviser in this. But, dear, dear Robert," said she—for he had thrown himself at her feet, and was holding both her hands in his, gazing up at her with a face full of such earnest, passionate, almost reverential worship, that she hardly dared meet his glances—"but dear, dear Robert, if they kill you, be assured they shall know they will also kill me!"

Oh, Robert, my father reckons sadly without his host, if he thinks we are to be divided now, in life or in death ! ”

Her arms met round his neck, her head bowed to his, and the lips met in one fond kiss of purest, deepest affection. Forgotten were all the dangers, the bitter trials, the shattered hopes of the past. They thought of nothing but the present, and of the merciful chance which had enabled them to defeat the machinations of their foes, and to meet each other, for the purpose of renewing the vows plighted by them in their childish years. From the deepest abysses of gloom these two hearts were suddenly raised into such an ecstasy of delight, as is possible only in that state which most nearly approaches heaven—the perfect love of two lovers whose hearts have been drawn together by a strange and mysterious affinity, which seems to govern their whole being.

Let us leave the husband and wife to their bridal, which thus strangely came at last, with no bridal feast, no summoning of smiling kindred from far and wide, no ringing of joy bells—but, on the contrary, one held only in the extremest danger ; where between every two words of murmured broken happiness, came one from Hermia of alarm, and of danger ;—soon to be stifled by his assurances and caresses.

Not till the first dawning of the light of day did they think to part, nor until Hermia had again turned pale with affright, as she thought of the possibility of his being recognised while leaving her, and carried off a prisoner.

"Robert," she said to him, "do not, my own darling husband, come *here* again. No, no; do not thus venture your dear, sweet, precious life! Think of me, and be pitiful. Save yourself for my sake! Will you not?"

"I shall come again, and risk all!" he said in answer, smiling.

"No, no! I entreat you not to do so!"

"Think, Hermia, of what you ask. They have too long robbed us of our natural happiness in each other's society. But it is not that alone—there is another matter. They must know now, and the sooner the better, that I have claimed you by a right impossible for them to violate—you are now my own true wife. I am your husband, and no legal juggleries of divorce—no tamperings with our child-marriage will avail. Let them, therefore, find out the truth. I care not how soon. Nor do I see that they could better discover the truth than here."

"In that at least," said a sharp, stinging kind of voice, the sound of which drove every drop of blood from Lady Hermia's cheeks, "we can agree."

Lord Cecil, the earl's son, stood before them.

"Your brother, Hermia?" guessed Lord Langton.

"This lady's brother, certainly I am. But I think, sir——"

He was interrupted by the words, which were, however, uttered very quietly—

"You address General Viscount Langton!"

"I know no Viscount Langton. I did know a rebel of that name, who disgraced his family, his friends, and his country by ——"

"Beware," said the General, sternly. "You cannot intend to forget this lady's presence. Permit me, then, to remind you she is present, and therefore insults to me cannot be answered now."

"This lady! If this wanton had not forgotten herself, and descended to harbour a traitor——"

General Langton sprang forward, but Lady Hermia was too quick for him; she interposed between the two men, clasped her brother in her arms, with a force so great and so clinging that he could not throw her off, and thus holding him, she said:

"Brother, whether or no I may ever forgive you this cruel, shameless, most infamous insult, heaven only knows—but at least pretend to make no more mistakes. This is my husband—a husband I pray only that I may ever be worthy of—a husband to whom I was given by your father—a husband to

whom I have now solemnly devoted myself—a husband I warn you not to touch or meddle with. For even if you overpower him, imprison him, try him, condemn him, and execute him—even then I shall live just long enough to make you known to the whole world as the vilest, most detestable of brothers—who murders his sister merely to gratify his own rancorous hatred! Ay, you may struggle with me, but this is the truth, Cecil, and I will not let you go till you own it, and confess how you have wronged me!”

The face of Lord Cecil was almost purple with the inward passions that consumed him, and the outward struggle of his sister’s strong grasp.

Unable to throw her off without a violence so brutal that it was even beyond what he was prepared for—conscious at the same time that if he did this his sister’s husband would instantly challenge him to a death-duel, out of which one only could emerge, he contented himself with hissing into Hermia’s ear the words:

“Fool! You may detain me, because I might otherwise hurt you—but to what end? Can you arrest the king’s messengers? Do you not understand they wait for him outside, and that in consequence I am here?”

Lady Hermia gazed for a moment in his face incredulously; then seeing the hard, intense look of

satisfaction that was obviously settled there, she changed in an instant her whole behaviour.

She unclasped her hand, let him loose, rose to her feet, and then burst into a kind of hysteric laughter mingling with tears.

General Langton spoke to her, tried to caress her, but she pushed him away, then stopped, looked intently at vacancy, drew back her hair—as if feeling she needed a cooler brain to see with—then turned, and said with a most sad and touching laugh, that was, indeed, more of a sob than a laugh—

“Oh, Cecil, brother—dear, dear brother—my only one; do you forget that we two are alone? I have no brother, if not you! You have no sister, if not me! Cecil, forgive me—on my knees I ask it—if I said bitter, angry, unjust things. Listen to me—listen!” Then unconsciously her pleading, passionate tone changed again to one of solemn invocation. “You cannot intend to have this man’s blood on your head? No, no—impossible! assure me it is impossible! Hark, Cecil! I tell my story very badly; but you can forgive that. This—my husband—is no rebel!”

“Few rebels are after failure,” interposed Lord Cecil, with a sneer that seemed to freeze Lady Hermia’s blood.

She gazed at him with an averted form and gesture, as if asking herself whether she should



longer urge him, or rise and defy him, and brave all consequences.

No doubt she would have done so, were it only herself she had to consider; but a single thought of, and glance at, her husband, who stood proudly apart, gazing with folded arms and a half-smiling face on the fury of Lord Cecil, caused her again passionately to address her brother—

“Brother! Cecil! before it is too late I again address myself to you. My husband has, with rare bravery and dignity, gone in person to St. Germain's and formally renounced his allegiance. He has risked much in so doing; and now he comes back to his own countrymen, confiding in their justice, their liberality, and their good sense.”

“Their good sense, my sister!” said Lord Cecil. “I pray you tell me how the rebel is to rely on their good sense to aid him?”

“He relies,” responded Lady Hermia, “on the good sense of his countrymen, when he comes back to throw himself upon their considerate feeling, while reminding them that if ever England is to be one, and relieved from the cruel strife of dynastic parties, she can only have such unity by welcoming with open arms every fugitive who comes honourably from the opposing camp, and asks to be received.”

“Very well. Then let this particular rebel have-

the full benefit of his logic after he has put it before a jury and before his abused king. Are we agreed?"

"On what?" demanded Lady Hermia, her eye gazing in a kind of distracted manner about.

"That he calmly gives himself up, and then relies on his logic to save him!"

"Cecil, the gulf between us, I see, widens and widens every minute. Oh, brother, you know not what you do! But so surely as you make yourself the instrument of the arrest of my husband, so surely will the curses of the bereaved widow cling to you if he comes to any harm. Take your own course. I will degrade myself no further by appealing to a man who is insensible alike to the ties of blood, to affection, to honour! Betrayer of the unfortunate and the confiding, call in and let loose your bloodhounds. From this moment I will never exchange word or touch with you!"

Then she went to Lord Langton, and taking his hand, said:

"My dear, noble husband—dearer infinitely to me, and a thousand times more noble in this your adversity and danger, than while all England trembled at your name, and prepared itself for it knew not what, your victory or defeat—can you, Robert Langton, ever forgive me, that I debased myself and humiliated myself—*your* wife—by stooping to

ask for kindly and honourable consideration from so despicable and poor a creature as this ?”

“Hermia,” responded General Langton, “to clasp you thus—to listen to you thus—is to me so ravishing a bliss, that I would consciously incur all the danger over again—ay, rush into it with my eyes open—if in no other way I might reap such a harvest of happiness.”

Lord Cecil gazed on them both, as if he might be hesitating, even at this last moment, to complete the work he had began ; but there was no such stuff in his thoughts, as they soon learned.

“Hermia, I wait but for your departure!” he said, in a hard, dogged tone.

Lady Hermia whispered in her husband’s ear, and the General responded in her place.

“I think my wife, Lord Cecil, wishes you to understand that she has nothing in the world to do with your arrangements, except to note their character. But I may, on my own account, add this : If you spoke just now through consideration for my wife, not wishing her to be present at my arrest, I thank you, and respond by saying I wait your pleasure.”

“Will you, then, follow me to the other side of the door, where they wait you ?”

“No ; it would be useless, for my wife would, I perceive, refuse to be divided from me, except by

force; so that what you do not wish to happen here would happen all the same there. In a word, my lord, my wife is determined that you shall have all the responsibility of my arrest in her bed-chamber—my wife's bed-chamber—the bed-chamber of your own sister. It may be inconvenient to you, my lord, but I can hardly blame her!"

With a scowl at both their faces, Lord Cecil went to the door, threw it open, and cried, in a loud voice:

"Arrest a traitor—the so-called General Viscount Langton!"

Nearly a dozen armed men advanced, with a superior officer at their head; who paused and stood for a moment irresolute, on seeing Lady Hermia clasped in her husband's arms; though, obviously, his clasp was only in fond reply to the passionate hold of him she maintained.

She turned her head a little and said:

"Sir, do your duty, whatever it be, fearlessly. And, to prevent mistakes, let me say that it is my brother who sets this business on. This is my husband, who has but newly returned from Paris, where he has been to renounce his allegiance, and now throws himself on the clemency of his sovereign! His Majesty will, no doubt, pardon the mode in which my husband is obliged to present himself before him. He has but just arrived—did but come

to consult with me how best to proceed to make a respectful and dutiful approach to the king. We should have promptly acted; but, if you ask why this has not been done, I refer you to Lord Cecil, whose action alone has put us both in this cruel and false state. That is all I have to say. Tell us, sir, what we have to do, and we shall obey you, as we would the king himself; who has now no more faithful servants than Lord Langton and his wife!"

"It is with deep regret, my lady, that I fulfil my office. Robert Langton—commonly called General and Viscount Langton—I arrest you, as a traitor, in his Majesty's name!"

"I cannot very well surrender myself as a traitor," responded Lord Langton, with a smile, "for I have been for some days cherishing feelings and views of sincere loyalty; but it matters little the why or the wherefore. I do surrender, and quite acknowledge I have been what his Majesty must think and call a rebel!"

"Would Lady Hermia, in her great goodness, now leave us? Of course she will easily obtain admittance to you at the Tower."

There was an earnest, pleading look in the officer's eye that Lord Langton could not but notice. He felt sure that the officer spoke in kindness, and he soon guessed what the secret motive might be.

"Hermia, darling, good-bye!"

"No, do not think it. I shall go with you to the Tower!"

The officer glanced aside at Lord Cecil, whose menacing look warned him he was compromising his own future by his over-gentleness, and then he said :

"Pardon me—that is impossible!"

"Why?" she demanded, with flashing eyes, and a superb look of disdain.

"Hermia, this gentleman has no choice!" said Lord Langton.

She looked at her husband for a moment intently, while her eyes filled with tears. Then she proudly dashed them off, let him go, and stood apart, saying :

"Proceed, sir, with your duty!"

Again looks were exchanged between Lord Cecil and the officer, and with the same result as before. Whatever the unpleasant duty might be that the officer sought to evade, it was evident that, as the general saw, he was to have no choice.

But even then the officer had the manliness to avow his feeling about the matter, for he began to apologise as to what it was his painful duty to see done; and then, while General Langton and his wife remained in suspense, the officer went to a soldier, and whispered to him.

The man came forward, having a bag in his hand, from which he produced a pair of bright, shining steel handcuffs.

"For him!" And Lady Hermia pointed to her husband incredulously.

"Hermia, would I could believe I was worthy to share these manacles with some of the men who have also worn them; and to whom it has been permitted to walk this earth in glory for its shame and redemption. Do not fear, Hermia — they will not hurt me!"

So saying, he held out his hands with a smile — and a smile that, as it became fixed on his wife's face, calmed her, even amid the stormy and passionate heart-currents that were beating within.

"Hermia," he said, "I look for you at the earliest possible hour. You will get to me, I know that. Happily, we are no obscure unfortunates, whom mighty men like your brother might make sport of, and be no worse in their own characters and position. This business of to-day will fly far and wide. My crimes, if they are crimes, have not been done in a corner. I shall wait, darling, be sure of that, for the end of all, in a calm and assured spirit; asking nothing but that you, too, will show to the world we both alike know how to live and how to die."

He turned, and folding his arms, he said to the officer:

"It is my safety as a captive you seek by this measure, not my personal annoyance, I presume?"

"Certainly, sir," said the officer.

"Then I think it will only be creditable to His Majesty and myself if we keep this indignity unknown."

He then folded his arms so as, with the aid of his upper garment—a kind of loose over-coat—to conceal the irons, and walked straight out of the room, not even giving a single look back.

In rather undignified haste the armed troop bustled after him; and when he reached the hall he found another batch of men waiting to precede him; and so they marched off to the Thames, there to take the barge that waited to carry him to the Tower.



## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE TOWER.

SHUTTING his eyes to all passing sights of the river, and refusing to think just yet of the future, General Langton allowed himself to fall back on the happiness he had enjoyed in his brief honeymoon of a night; and on the character of his wife, that now more than realised his utmost hopes of her.

How stern she had been while it was a case of political duty on her side to keep him from her! How sweet and beautiful in her instantaneous change, when the barrier was removed, and she had only to reveal to him her true self!

He felt she did indeed cleave to him with all the strength of a rich and strong nature; and that, if his blood was to be poured out on Tower Hill, he could still look back and say:

“I have lived and loved, and am grateful to thee, O Heaven, who hast vouchsafed to me such an unspeakable blessing!”

The barge sped swiftly on, rowed by so many

expert boatmen. The dangerous sterlings of the bridge were shot in safety, and presently the speed was slackened. General Langton was thus roused from his reverie, and beheld a low arched gateway, through which they were about to pass.

"What is the name of this gateway?" asked General Langton of the officer.

"It is called Traitor's Gate."

General Langton rose to his feet, and said in an animated tone :

"God bless King William ! If any man has a right now to say that, I have ; and I hope there may be among those who hear me men who will repeat to His Majesty my words, for they are honest, and he will know they are when he hears them."

The prow of the barge struck suddenly against the wide stone steps that rose upwards out of the water ; and the prisoner, hampered with the irons, had nearly fallen through the impetus.

Raising his manacled arms to enable himself to recover his balance, he struck his cheek so violently with the irons as to draw blood. But he would not allow the officer to minister to him ; made light of the incident, and ceased to notice it.

Presently they came to a grand-looking—but also most tragic-looking — tower, and again General Langton, who had never seen the Tower, while always hearing so much about it in connection with

friends and victims of the Jacobite cause, asked its name.

"The Bloody Tower," responded the officer; and General Langton seemed to see inscribed on it the sanguinary records of the many men and women who had passed through it, never to return, except when on their way to death.

There was a crowd collected by this gateway:—idlers of the Tower population—always a considerable one—women only too glad of a new excitement, with possibly a sprinkling of the friends and relations of prisoners, who had by lapse of time been permitted extra indulgences.

A curious custom of the Tower now challenged the prisoner's notice. One of the officials came forward and demanded the upper garment of the prisoner as his perquisite.

General Langton turned inquiringly to the officer by his side, who answered:

"Yes, it is the custom—a custom more honoured in the breach than in the observance, I should say; but so it is."

General Langton smiled, and asked the official himself to remove the garment, a costly one, lined with the richest silk, which it was found could not be done without the previous removal of the irons.

These, however, the officer caused to be taken off, with the kindly remark:

"I hope there will be no need to put them on again."

"I hope so, too," said the General. Then, addressing the Tower official who was removing his coat, he said with a smile, "Exchange is no robbery; the air is chill; have you nothing to lend me till I repurchase this from you?"

"Oh, yes," said the personage addressed; "I will immediately provide you with something: the dungeons are terribly cold!"

The spectators naturally watched with interest this little episode.

Suddenly the group opened in obedience to the impulse of a strong moving power from behind, and there emerged from it the very lad who had been so long on the watch outside Lord Bridgeminster's house; and who, it will be remembered, had seen the figure enter the gates secretly—that figure which ultimately proved to be General Langton.

Except that this lad was cleaner, and exhibited no broom in token of his vocation, he appeared, with one exception, exactly as he had previously appeared at the street crossing, when he had received on one occasion alms from General Langton himself.

That exception was a very large exception. The street-sweeper's face had been bright, animated, playful, or at least, always seemed to be so in speak-

ing to any one; this lad's face was as dark and ominous-looking as the sun in an eclipse.

Forcing his way through the crowd, the lad now presented himself in front to the advancing party just about to pass under the archway of the Bloody Tower.

"Stand aside!" shouted one of the armed guards to him.

The lad took no notice, but came closer and addressed General Langton personally.

There was something in his look and gestures that struck everyone as betokening some great, overwhelming emotion, and in consequence he was tacitly permitted to take his own course.

"You know me?" he demanded, with eyes flashing like sudden bursts of flame.

"I! I do not indeed. Stay! is it possible—Clarence Harvey? Why, in mercy's name, are you disguised like this?"

"You do know me, then," said the youth, "but I want you to know me better—much better. Your friend, Christina—do you know where she is?"

"No."

"Here, in the Tower, waiting for you."

"Here!" responded the unhappy man.

"Your friend, the Mercer, where is he?" continued the youth.

"I fear, here too."

"Yes! And bound for the scaffold!"

The General closed his eyes, in silent anguish. His tormentor continued :

"Where is George Osborne?"

"I know nothing of him."

"Then let me tell you; he, too, is here. Oh! but the Tower was rich before you came, and now——"

"Farewell, Clarence," said General Langton; "I know not why you thus meet me, or why you speak in a tone that implies joy rather than grief."

"What! you do not yet know the essential truth that makes all the other truth so sweet?—you do not know it was I who sent the bloodhounds after your friends when you deserted me, and when George Osborne——"

Here the assumed calmness was broken—a cry burst from him and tears—and then he said :

"But I am avenged on him—on you all! Know, General Viscount Langton, it was I who watched you, hour by hour, and day by day, till I saw you enter the earl's house, and you were caught. Taste now the cup for yourselves that you have all made me drink of! Taste! Taste! It is the last thing I shall ever ask of you."

"What I feel, Clarence Harvey, it is useless to explain to you. You would not understand me; your whole nature is too hopelessly corrupted. Miserable, unhappy wretch, stand aside! Leave me, I

say!" and for the first time in his life was General Langton seen to be transported with an anger so great as to make him lose self-control.

"Leave me, and go to the fate that waits you! Betrayer of innocent men and women, know you not there is an Avenger of blood behind you that will drive you on, if not to receive the reward of your crimes from an earthly tribunal, then at least to receive that bitterest of all penalties, those which are self-imposed? Stand aside, woman, abandoned of your sex, abandoned of your friends, abandoned of your God!"

Maria had again and again striven to interrupt him, but could not through the unusual impetuosity of his speech.

"Farewell, then, General Langton; but ere you go, take with you my last message to George Osborne. Tell him I had forgiven his pretty idol; that I had no ill-will against his master; above all, tell him I would have served you——"

Here Maria's strength again gave way, and she was obliged to pause for a moment and repress the sobs and tears that came now thicker and faster.

"Yes," she went on, "I would have served you faithfully to the death—been content to have lived on bread and water—I who have habitually known every luxury; tell him that, and say that it was not you, nor his pale-faced lady-love, nor the good

knight I wanted to strike, but HIM! and I have struck him! He knows now that the blood of you all rests on his head. Tell him that, and then tell him this!"

She drew a dagger from her breast, so swiftly and unexpectedly that there was no time to arrest her arm, and plunged it, with frantic violence, into her bosom.

In an instant she was lying prostrate on the ground, her blood pouring forth in a stream that reddened all the stones.

General Langton forgot his anger and righteous indignation; he stooped down, raised her head on his knees, and there met her smile!

Strange to say, that smile had recovered all its old sweetness, with a new charm arising from the deadly sadness that mingled with the seeming pleasure.

"Can you forgive me?" that smile seemed to say; and presently she did manage faintly to breathe forth some such words.

"I have been terribly wicked. George's behaviour to me—just as it is, perhaps, in other people's eyes—maddened me. I haven't been the same woman since; I have lived but in the idea of vengeance! Oh, how many times have I thought I should go mad! Oh, dear master, do you not know what I know—that it is not on you but on myself I have called the vengeance down? Oh, yes. I would



give all the world, were it mine, to be able to undo the work of these last few days and weeks! Oh, that it could be undone, even if it left me—thus!”

Here she wrung her hands in wild anguish.

“But they cannot harm you! You saved the king’s life! I thought of that—I did, indeed! Believe me—do believe me in that!”

“I do believe you, Maria.”

“Will you ask the officer to come near me?” faintly whispered Maria.

The officer came near, and stooped to listen.

“Sir,” she said, faintly, and stopping at times between her words, “the Mercer—Sir Richard, and George Osborne, and Mistress Christina are not Jacobites, any of them! It was I who concealed the stick in his private closet!”

“Quick!” called out the officer, “let her—for it seems this is a woman, not a man—let her be sworn on the Bible!”

Hurriedly ran away one of the spectators, and soon returned with the Holy Book.

Maria’s eyes were fast glazing in death. She did not see the person return, and hold out the book; but when it touched her lips she seemed to revive and to understand, and she kissed it fervently, repeating:

“I swear—to—the—truth—of what—I—I—just now—said! Not—not Jacobites—at all!”

She fainted ; and, for a moment or two, they all thought she was dead. But General Langton, with earnest face and quivering lips, besought them to pause yet a few minutes longer, saying :

“She was the daughter of one of my father’s most cherished retainers—of a man so devoted to my father, that——”

“That his daughter murders the son of a man he so loved ! Ha ! ha !” screamed out Maria, with terrible and despairing cries. Then one long, piercing shriek rang through the gloomy archway and then all was silent and motionless—for a minute or more ; and the sad procession moved on, leaving behind the corpse of the spy.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE SUPPLIANT.

THE night—or rather the early morning—when Lord Langton was arrested, on the information of Maria, was a busy one with certain great personages. Maria had informed Lord Cecil; Lord Cecil informed his father, the Earl of Bridgeminster; and the earl informed the king.

In consequence, a cabinet council was sitting at the very time the arrest was being made; and it may be observed in passing, that Lord Cecil's position made it really impossible for him to pause, after moving in the matter at all, knowing, as he did, that the king's very eyes were, in a sense, upon him, and the king's ears waiting for the welcome announcement—"He is in the Tower, and safe!"

And that moment—so long hoped for by the king and his advisers—came at last. Lord Cecil suddenly appeared before the cabinet, heated and perspiring, and exclaimed:

"God save the king! His greatest and last enemy is in his hands!"

"You bring us welcome news, young man—Lord

Cecil no more by courtesy, but the Earl of Norwood in your own right, as son of the DUKE OF BRIDGEMINSTER, to whom we now again confirm the sequestered estates of this rebel, in acknowledgment of his and your great services to the nation, and to my family!"

Father and son alike prostrated themselves in gratitude; and, in the enjoyment of their new dignities, forgot Hermia, and all the backbitings and hatreds of the Jacobite party—once their own.

"And now," continued the king, "I have but little to say beyond this—a speedy trial, sentence, and execution!"

He paused a minute or two, and then added, in a remarkable tone:

"I shall esteem that man or woman my most disloyal subject who ventures to ask—or to allow others to ask, through him—for clemency towards so desperate a rebel. Fortune has put him into my hands, and I will not—no," he ejaculated, with a solemn, upward look, "I will not peril my own or my people's quiet by leaving it possible for him to raise the banner of rebellion once more. My lords and gentlemen, I do not doubt but that my words find an echo in all your hearts. Is it not so?"

"All—all, your majesty!" was the universal response.

"The truth is, sire," said the Earl of Bridgminster—or, to give him his future title, the Duke—"we had all been consulting among ourselves on this very matter; and, knowing your majesty's kindness of heart, were about to address to you a unanimous request to do the very thing that your majesty, as a consummate statesman and true father of his people, has already determined upon!"

"I am truly glad of this. Now, indeed, I feel strong in my purpose, and you may all rest assured I shall abide by it."

"May it please your majesty to bend your eyes for one moment away from the mightier cares of the state, to give your grateful servant counsel on a matter personal to myself?"

"Certainly—certainly, your grace! Speak, and speak freely!"

"Has your majesty yet heard that this unfortunate man is, in a certain slight way, related to myself?"

"Related to you?" The king's small eyes twinkled uneasily, as he ruminated on what this new fact might mean.

"As a boy, he was married to my daughter Hermia, then, also, a mere child."

"Is it possible! Is it possible! I have heard vague rumours of some romantic love story of this kind, but never did I believe them true."

"Unhappily, they are so far true that he—even

while I was hoping to get the marriage set aside—has been arrested in his wife's apartment !”

“You astonish me,” said the king. “You distress me ! Lady Hermia ! I did not count on this.”

“And I hope your majesty will at once, and for ever, dismiss any painful feelings the incident may call forth. I am an Englishman, not a Roman ; but I trust have enough of the Roman's stoicism to bear the things that may be to me calamities, but to the state the choicest blessings. Besides, your majesty,” added the duke, with a slight tinge of colour faintly crossing his cheek, “I have no love for him, nor he for me. We are, in a word, enemies ; unhappily connected by a single and frail tie, which he has now himself snapped !”

The king looked grave, and presently he said—

“What does the Lady Hermia propose to do ?”

“I know not, your majesty, but can guess.”

“And you think, no doubt, that I may guess, too ?”

The duke bowed.

“And if she does come to me, what on earth am I to say to her ? Dreadful ! It is really dreadful ! Her very wedding night—for so I understand you to speak—to be changed into such a sad, black business.”

“If your majesty will pardon a hint——”

"I shall be grateful for any suggestion that may lessen the pain of such an interview. It is not possible, I fear, to evade it altogether."

"I fear not, your majesty. My daughter has something in her of the family tenacity, and can hold fast. But this is what I was about to say. She will be wanting admittance to the Tower—wanting indulgences for him there. These I will take care she shall not be able to obtain, except through your majesty."

"Good—very good! I may then yield something."

"Your majesty will thus show your own clemency in a safe way. You will also enable me to feel that this unhappy gentleman's last hours may have every possible solace. I am most anxious for that!"

"The feeling does your grace credit. But let there be no beating about the bush—no coming upon me with unexpected surprises. You do not—tell me, I charge you, in all sincerity of heart—you do not expect, not even hope, that I may thus be induced to spare him?"

"Certainly not, your majesty, for I should expect, if I did, to have the curses of the nation on my head. If he were spared, and, through such ill-judged clemency, our land were again deluged with blood——"

"That is sufficient. It was not that I hesitated!

I feel for Lady Hermia, but she must pardon me if I also feel for myself!"

A servant now came to the door. The duke went to him, received his message, and went back to say to the king—

"Your majesty is happily prepared. *She is here!*"

When Lady Hermia, a few minutes after, was admitted to the king, she found him alone, and standing formally to receive her.

Seeing her pallid looks, but also noting her unfaltering step and dignified gestures, both in making her lowly obeisance and in rising from it the king advanced to meet her, holding out his hand.

She took it respectfully, kissed and held it passionately, and weeping, threw herself on her knees before him, crying—

"Oh, sire, you see before you one who is the happiest, or the most truly wretched of women; and who comes to ask your majesty which she is to be."

This beginning disturbed the king's comparative composure, and for a moment or two prevented his replying directly to her question.

"Rise, Lady Hermia."

Hermia did not rise, but said hurriedly—

"Sire, I have another title, dearer to me infinitely, because—because it is a title that I predict shall be no less dear to your majesty, if——"



"What title do you speak of?" interrupted the king, a little harshly.

"I am, sire, Hermia, Viscountess Langton, now, and for ever more!"

"Do you not know that the rebel of whom you speak has been attainted, his rank abolished, and his estates passed to other hands?"

"Oh, yes, sire—his unhappy wife knows all that; but she also knows that what he did was done throughout in honour; and that he broke away from his old allegiance the very instant honour permitted, never—never to return to it!"

"My dear young lady, we may not discuss these things. As a man, I feel for you—as a king, I am bound to close my heart!"

"You cannot do it! No, sire—it is impossible! Your heart, your humanity, your policy, your *conscience* will all be against taking the life of a man who has saved yours!"

This was certainly a powerful stroke—so powerful, indeed, as to be absolutely self-destructive. The king changed colour—moved away a pace or two to hide the excitement, the irritation, the all-devouring rage he felt at being reminded of just the one element of the business that he had determined to forget or to disbelieve. When he came back, Lady Hermia—or, as we shall now call her, Lady Langton—saw at a

glance the mischief she had done, and bled at heart.

"Is that all you have to say?" demanded the king, in a tone of icy quietude, that seemed absolutely to deprive the sad petitioner of any hope.

"Oh, your majesty, forgive—I entreat, implore you to forgive—the error of an unhappy woman—one not accustomed to the ways of politicians, nor heedful how to think one thing while saying another. Can your majesty wonder that I—as loyal an Englishwoman, I dare to avow, as breathes in the whole of your majesty's dominions—can your majesty wonder that I, a devoted subject, must love and honour my husband all the more, that he, while avowedly playing the rebel part, would not also play, or allow to be played, the part of the assassin, and against my own dear, rightful sovereign?"

"Oh, yes, your majesty, I shall always see in my husband, not merely my lover, but the man who guarded, for the loving people of this realm, the sovereign who was and is so dear to them!"

"Guarded!" said the king. "Why, the man had in his pocket the French king's commission, and wears to this very moment—so I am told—under his ordinary garb, the uniform of a French general! A pretty guard! It was well, young lady, I had other and more faithful guardians in your father and brother; or England might at this moment have been

in insurrection, and the rebels enjoying the support of a French army, which your most loyal husband was to have led !

“ You, Lady Langton, may not know these things, but they are true. He was arrested, some weeks ago, in the midst of a knot of conspirators—some of them fresh and red-handed from the murder plot—and he only escaped them by his possession of the devil’s own strength and sleight of hand.

“ Enough ! I have him now, and do not mean to let him try any more such costly and murderous experiments ! You are a child in these matters, and cannot understand ! ”

“ I am a woman, and can feel, sire ! ” said Lady Langton, with a look of the most eloquent and bitter reproach, which only made the king more angry.

“ Look here, madam,” said the king, as if touching a paper on the table. “ Look at the news of a single day : A riot in the very streets of London, which, being put down and inquired into, proves to be another Jacobite weapon fired off, in the hope of hitting something or somebody, and doing some mischief. Happily, it proved but a worthless weapon and flashed in the pan.

“ Well, madam, in the same day I had placed before me, in writing, with accompanying plans and sketches, a detailed statement of all the forces now in England—where placed—and of all the forts and

strongholds I possess. It is an actual, however ugly a fact, that I do not myself possess, in any document of my own, so luminous a view of the real state of things as this traitorous paper shows. Can you not guess the author?"

"And does your majesty think that the man who was so able—if, also, he were honest—should be rejected when he comes, a suppliant at your feet, and offers his sword, his talents, his character, and his life, that they may all be henceforward devoted to your majesty's service?"

"When, pray, did your husband do this?"

"He meant to——"

"Meant!" interrupted the king, with a cold, unfeeling smile, that almost put Lady Langton beside herself with passionate grief and indignation.

"He meant to do this, sire. He lost not a moment in hurrying back from Paris, after throwing off his previous duty. He came to me, not only as to his wife, but as to the daughter of your most trusted minister, so that we might take counsel together as to how best approach your majesty, when—when——"

Lady Langton's feelings would no longer bear restraint; she wrung her hands and wept bitterly, with utter abandonment of herself.

Perhaps, after all, this was her wisest course. The king calmed by degrees, then spoke gently,

and finally took her by the hand and made her rise.

"Come, my dear Lady Langton, I have been striving in my inmost heart to see if I could find any crumb of comfort with which to lessen the poignancy of your grief——"

Lady Hermia's brightening eye and rapt look warned him to finish his sentence more quickly.

"— And to enable you to bear, and to teach him to bear his inevitable lot. I find that prisoners such as he is have a double punishment—their ultimate fate, and the waiting for that ultimate fate. Comforts are denied them; degradations are sometimes imposed upon them: fire they cannot get, nor have they always sufficient clothing. The chancellor, Sir Thomas More, if we remember rightly, once had earnestly to petition for the means to keep warmth within his aged body. Visitors also are rarely permitted. Lady Langton, for your sake, will I now write and give to you my own order that he be permitted every reasonable comfort not inconsistent with his safe custody; will you not thank me for that?"

"I do thank you, sire, with all the strength of my poor, failing, sad heart."

"And do I rightly divine that your presence in the Tower, under such regulations as the Lieutenant can sanction, will be also agreeable to you?"

“There is only one thing on earth, your majesty, besides that which could make me more eternally grateful to you.”

That “one thing besides” the king did not choose to hear; and the weeping woman was fain to drag herself away, conscious that even before trial, she took to her husband his death-warrant.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE NINE DAYS' WONDER.

NEITHER the king nor the newly-created Duke of Bridgeminster reckoned upon an element that, after all, became speedily of manifest importance. The story of the young couple, of their strange child-marriage, of their enforced separation, their meeting at last after so many years of estrangement, of their opposite political creeds, and then, finally, the arrest of the young nobleman in his wife's chamber after their bridal night—all this gave society a subject to talk about and gossip over such as it had not enjoyed for many a long year.

The fact, that this very nobleman had, within the last few weeks, signalised himself by two such actions as giving the king warning of the plot upon his life, while, at the very moment, he was maturing his plans for a civil war—also wonderfully enhanced the interest of the story, and caused its details to be received with the greatest zest.

It began to be remarked that there was, at

all events, one Jacobite wonderfully popular, and that man, the most dangerous man of the whole party.

His generosity to his enemy—his bravery in risking the double danger of being supposed faithful to neither party—above all, his chivalrous devotion, to James, when the fact oozed out that he had, while before King William, played the Jacobite in the most determined spirit, captivated the hearts of the people, and hardened the heart of the king.

His conduct on the trial, when he pleaded “guilty,” and in words of quiet dignity threw himself on the mercy of the sovereign, intensified alike the favour of the people, and the hatred of their ruler.

“Will the Government execute him?” was now the question. Or, would there be a reconciliation between the king and his noble but rebellious subject, and thus a heavy blow be struck against the Jacobite cause? The question was promptly decided:—

It was quite impossible, everybody said, that a man who had rendered the king so great a service, and whose wife was the daughter of the king’s chief minister, should be sent to the scaffold.

Consequently there was a cheerful tone pervading London during the first two or three of those terrible days that followed the trial and sentence of death; and that tone penetrated the hoary Tower



walls and found its way into the captive's dungeon, and cheered the hearts of the two devoted lovers, just as a ray of sunshine gladdened their eyes whenever, by any chance, such a thing reached them.

But aristocratic London experienced an awkward check to its amiable sympathies when it became known that a nobleman, who, relying on the public opinion of that potent personage—fashion—had ventured to act as its representative, and to assure His Majesty that the anticipated clemency would be grateful to all, had received a rebuff so strong—so insulting—that the haughty recipient had retired at once from Court, and gone away in disgust to his place in the country.

Two parties then were formed, one clamouring for General Langton's blood; the other urging that if he were dealt with magnanimously, it was more than probable that England would have seen the last of Jacobitism and civil war.

No one ventured to address the king personally in this spirit. But His Grace the Duke of Bridgminster found himself assailed in all sorts of ways; by mobs, who shouted at him, and broke his windows; by letters; by personal calls; by appeals in the newspapers; by deputations; all asking the same thing—How could *he*, the father of the unhappy man's wife, reconcile it to his conscience—to his humanity, to his parental duty, not to interfere

and demand his pardon or ransom from the king? Even a bribe of almost fabulous amount was suggested darkly, and, as it were, afar off.

The duke, to do him justice, played his part well: never got angry, never forgot his cue—that of the father sacrificing his child on the altar of his country—and so maintained a firm and impassive front.

But all these facts, tending to show the current of public feeling, reached Lady Hermia, and she determined on the third day after the trial to see her father once more.

“Robert,” she said, as she received his kiss at the dungeon door, “I have no hope.”

“Nor I—except that you will not be long away from me on such unprofitable errands.”

From the moment of her failure with the king, followed so quickly by the trial and sentence, Lady Hermia had languished as if some deadly malady had seized her.

Each day it was with greater difficulty that she had dragged herself from the Tower on her hopeless errands in quest of succour. Each day the captive's passionate tears and kisses had fallen on colder hands and lips. The chill of his early grave seemed to have settled upon her heart, and she could not throw it off, even in the presence of his own courage and warm love.

It was an intense relief to her father that such helplessness had smitten her. What rescue might his deadly foe expect from this beautiful statue ; who, though she went about constantly to friends, entreating intercession in his behalf, went with despair in her haggard eye, and the very knell of death in her faint voice ?

And to some extent, he found he was right when he was obliged to confront her. For her behaviour in their interview was remarkable in more than one respect as contradicting character. She was depressed, listless, inergetic, just when every one who knew Lady Hermia might have most confidently relied on finding her full of unnatural life and passionate activity.

Perhaps it was that she had really had no hope, as she had said to her husband on leaving him, of help from her father. The obdurate king might possibly, at the last moment, change. But there was that mingling of evil elements in the soul of the Duke of Bridgeminster which forbade hope. He hated the victim with all the hatred of an unprincipled but sensitive renegade. He wanted him out of the way, so that his daughter might make a new and more promising alliance. He even dreaded his possible influence over the king, supposing him to be pardoned, and admitted to the king's intimacy. And, lastly, he believed that the dukedom just given to him had

been expressly given on the tacit understanding that it was to be the price of silence and acquiescence while his son-in-law went to death.

But there was another influence acting on Lady Langton. She meant to try yet other plans, and therefore had to get through this hopeless and failing one first.

When the father and daughter met for the first time since the trial, the duke, for once, could hardly conceal from himself he was afraid of her.

He had done his best to realise, in anticipation, her look, her first words, and her probable appeals, in order that he might fortify himself against them, and yield nothing, even for a moment, that it might be difficult to recall.

But when he saw that stately form bending and unsteady as with premature disease—that superb beauty faded as though the influences of full ten years had passed over her in only as many days—that calm, thoughtful, impressive manner changed into one of fitful impulse, broken purpose, hesitating will, there was for a moment something like compunction in the soul of the proud and revengeful minister; and had retreat been then possible without injury to his position with the king, Lady Langton might perhaps have gone back to the Tower dungeon in triumph.

But he had created a power stronger even than

his own power for resistance to all proposals of clemency. The king had passed out of the region of judicial thought into that of bad temper; and was impenetrable to all assaults, while dangerous to those who made the attempt. The duke was, indeed, firmly convinced in his own secret mind he would fail if he did risk himself by asking for mercy.

"Hermia," he said, as he folded her in his arms, "this is a sad meeting."

"No, sir, not sad, unless *you* will it so."

"I, my child! Alas, how little you know the truth! It is the king, now, who is so immovable—not I!"

"Do you remember, sir, a promise you made me about the time of the visit of the supposed diamond merchant?"

"Perfectly, Hermia. I told you I would claim General Langton's pardon should he fall into the position of danger I then anticipated for him, in return——"

"No, sir—in pity let your admission stop there! You know I did wait, did not make myself then known to my husband——"

"True, Hermia," said the duke, interrupting her; "but you must add that you did not marry Sir Charles, which was the counterpart of the engagement. Had you married him, he and I might alike have gone to the fountain source of mercy with clean

hands, and said, Pardon this man, oh, king, not because we, his relatives or friends, cannot bear to see him suffer the just penalty he has incurred, but because we, who might be supposed desirous of his death, now show our honesty in asking his life in accord with true motives of State policy. But now, Hermia, were I even to breathe a word on the subject to the king, he would tell me I had forgotten the State in my own selfish interests—perhaps hint I am myself still tainted with Jacobitism!”

“And could you not bear that, sir?” asked Hermia, “not even to save the life of your only daughter? You see me as I am, after only a few days have done their work on me. Judge, then, what I shall be the day I see him on the scaffold, and leave him there to—*to meet you!*”

She shuddered as she pronounced these words, and seemed already to look like a disembodied spirit of retribution coming to shake the soul of the merciless minister.

He felt the influence, and trembled as if with cold, but said to her—

“Hermia, my child, the night is inclement, let us draw nearer to the fire. Come, sit and try to discuss with me this terrible business in a calmer mood.”

“Sir, I must instantly return to the Tower, if this indeed is all you have to say to me.”

The duke did not answer her, and, wondering at

that, and fearfully alive to the least glimmering of hope that might cross her sad eyes, Hermia came close to him and sat before the great fire.

"Hermia," said the duke, after a long delay, "I want you to understand my position better than you do. The king, then, in a word, is furious for blood. The terrible spectacle of those days at Tyburn might have satisfied him—but they have not. He considers none of the criminals already executed were important enough to be treated as the closing measure of outraged justice. Why do I tell you these things now? Hermia, I do it in the hope that I may even yet show you how my mind has travailed in your service. What if I say to you that it is just possible that I, and others co-operating with me, might, by hurrying on the execution of another person, whom nothing can save, save your husband!"

"How? Oh, sir, you would not beguile me, not at such a time? How?"

"By pointing out to the king the growing dislike of the public to such executions, and trying to make him understand how universal the feeling is in favour of this particular prisoner."

Again Hermia shuddered, and covered her face with her hands, as she asked herself, was she to be the instrument in hurrying another to the terrible end from which she sought to save her husband!

Could she have hesitated over such a proposition even for a moment, it was certain she would have regretted the doing so, when she remembered how hopeless it would be to ask General Langton so to save his life.

But there was something in the duke's mind that disinclined him to pass away from the sinister ideas he had raised.

"Hermia," said he, "in one word, I think I dare offer you the life of General Langton, provided you accept it as the sacrifice of the life of Sir Richard Constable."

"You only tempt me, sir!" said Hermia, in great and increasing agitation. "Why should the king spare my husband for such reasons? Are not the lives of the whole in his hands?"

"Yes; but there has been a riot in the city, raised by the Jacobites. The king is greatly excited by it. If I and other members of the council were formally to suggest to the king the execution of a citizen so conspicuous as the knight has been, as more practically important than the execution of your husband, and that we are none of us prepared to advise the execution of both, I think that such a suggestion, fortified in other ways by means best known to ourselves, might succeed, and so all your desires be gratified."

"Do you, sir, believe the Mercer guilty?"



"If you ask me as a statesman, I reply yes, because he has been legally condemned. If you ask me as a private person my opinion, I confess I think his guilt might have been expected to have been made more clear."

"So, then, sir, if there be a chance for my husband at all, it is only by the death of this possibly innocent man?"

"That is the case, Hermia."

"Farewell, sir; I have my answer. You do then, condemn my husband to the block!"

"No, Hermia; it is you!"

"Father—let me use that sacred name which is too little known among us, so that it is no wonder we forget to be either fathers or children—father, we shall meet no more this side the day of death. In dooming my husband to the fate of a traitor, you have sounded the knell of your daughter's earthly happiness."

Turning without further speech, she walked slowly away, as rigidly upright as if she felt that the slackening of a nerve, the relaxing of a muscle, would cause her to fall prostrate on the floor.

## CHAPTER XXV.

PARDON—SIRE—PARDON !

ONLY two days after Lady Hermia's failure with her father, the king, when just about to leave the royal bed-chamber, saw before him a double line of prostrate ladies, all in mourning !

He started, wondered, bethought himself what it must mean, and waited, his changing colour and resentful expression alone showing what he felt.

"What masquerade, ladies, is this ?" he demanded. "Not another Jacobite conspiracy, I hope ?"

The nearest of the women now threw aside her veil ; and the king beheld a lady of such fair, transparent, youthful beauty, that she looked, amid her funereal trappings, like a saint, mourning not over her own sorrows, but the sorrows of humanity.

"Your name, young lady ?"

"Christina Constable, sire."

"Late prisoner in the Tower ?"

"Yes, sire ; but 'confessedly innocent, and so set free."

"Then are you not the daughter of the other traitor—Sir Richard Constable?"

"His daughter in everything, in his loyalty to your majesty—his daughter in love, devotion, and life-long care!"

"Young lady, these are embarrassing testimonials for you to bring to your king on your first introduction."

"If your majesty will deign to glance at this document, you will, sire, better understand my father; than whom there breathes not in the whole kingdom, a more devoted subject."

"Do you dare to assert his innocence?"

"His absolute innocence, sire," murmured Christina with half-closing eyes, as if to shut out the sight of the danger she invoked. "This paper will——."

The king took the proffered document from her trembling hand. It contained the dying deposition of Maria, and was endorsed by the lieutenant of the Tower, in evidence of its formal character. The King read it twice through, then called to the Duke of Bridgeminster who was standing near, and handing it to him, asked if he knew aught of the contents.

The duke glanced at the deposition, saw in an instant its importance, not only in proving the knight's innocence, but—he being set free—as tending to deepen the king's resolve to execute Langton,

in the very teeth of this deputation, which the wily minister believed had yet other business with the sovereign.

“If this be true, sire, and I see no reason to doubt it, I congratulate your majesty on the blessed mission that heaven itself has placed in your hands—to open the prison doors—and set the captive free.”

“May I do this at once?” asked the king absently, while glancing along the line of kneeling suppliants; having already in his mind done with the business in hand, while looking forward with annoyance to the possibilities of yet a fresh appeal.

“I think so, sire. And knowing as I do the pleasure your majesty feels when able to confer happiness, I think I may myself ask pardon for a humble offender, but one in whom I believe this young lady takes a flattering interest.”

“Ha! who is that?” demanded the king, noticing a vivid blush on Christina’s face.

“George Osborne—the Mercer’s apprentice, whose devotion to his master made him forget his duty to the State. But he has had his lesson; and if the master is freed, I advise your majesty to free the man also.”

“And does Miss Constable confirm what I have now heard?” asked the king; forgetting for a moment the cares of State, in the sweet but con-

fused expression and distress of the young girl.

"It is my father, sire, who must answer you! He once saved my life, your majesty," said Christina, scarcely able to speak.

"Tell your father," said the king, while a grim smile played over his saturnine features—"I revoke my message of mercy—if he does not satisfy you." Then turning to his minister, he added, "Send an order at once to the lieutenant to set them free; but as to you, young lady, go back to your father and say to him, the king accepts his protestations of innocence and loyalty; and will be glad to see that Sir Richard Constable exerts himself among his fellow-citizens in the cause of peace and order, which have been much disturbed of late."

With streaming eyes, through which however shone a joyous happy light, Christina caught at the king's hand and kissed it passionately.

He was moved and embarrassed by the demonstration, as one of a character to which, through his unpopularity, he was little accustomed. The kneeling ladies then saw their moment had arrived, and first one voice, then another cried,—

"Pardon, sire, pardon!" till the whole line took it up in a strange, melancholy, pleading chorus.

"Oh, sire, sire!" said Christina, remembering how much she owed to those behind her, through

the imposing spectacle they had presented to the king, "what is the gratitude that I—or my father's friends will feel for the goodness vouchsafed to-day in comparison with the gratitude of a whole nation for your mercy to one, who—who——." She there stopped in alarm at the sight of the king's face.

"Who what?" demanded the king, in his harshest tone, and in his most barbarous foreign accent.

"Pardon, sire, pardon!" was all Christina could then say; and "Pardon, sire, pardon!" was all the lovely suppliants on the palace floor thought it advisable to say after her—a prolonged echo of grief that died gradually away.

"And who are the other ladies present? Jacobites no longer, I suppose, when they want my aid?"

They threw aside their veils, and he saw the very flower of the youth and beauty of the aristocracy; and among them not a single one even remotely supposed to be connected with the adherents of James.

As his eye ran down the lane of the fair forms and faces, now on this side and now on that, he could not but be moved at the thought how much of social influence General Langton (for he needed no name to be pronounced by the suppliants) had, in his adversity, been able to bring to bear upon him, a king,

and a powerful and dreaded king, with avowed purposes hostile to all that the suppliants asked.

A kind of envy sprang up in the royal soul, as though he were confronted by an influence altogether beyond his own ; more subtle, 'impalpable to touch, but certain, real, strong. The throne and the dungeon seemed to stand for the moment as standards or tests of the individual qualities of their occupants, and to suggest to the king *he* was beaten.

They had reckoned, he thought, on using Christina's appeal for her father, which was almost sure to be successful, as a trap to catch him unawares, and in the melting mood ; with the precedent of one act of royal mercy immediately before them and him, to suggest the propriety of another still more striking, to follow in due sequence.

But their loyalty to their king assuredly did not teach them much knowledge of their king's state of mind. Their present attitude excited only his resentment and fury, and caused to turn to white heat his ire against themselves, and his passionate hatred against Langton.

But he could not afford to quarrel with them, or with their husbands, fathers and sons, by open denunciation or insult, so he said abruptly—

“Having refused his wife—the daughter of my most devoted servant—herself of unquestionable loyalty, the king can have no more to say.”

And then bowing to them with a ghastly smile of politeness on his features, he turned and with hasty steps left the place.

The minister followed his royal master with subdued mien, while inwardly exulting that now he could certainly bring the whole business to a sudden and sharp close, perhaps even before Hermia and he might again be obliged to meet.

They went to the king's private study, and feeling too deeply stirred to care for the formalities of rank and etiquette, William made his minister sit down while he paced the room to and fro, talking now to him, now to himself.

The duke, ever wary and wily, reserved his own counsel, till he had learned what the king should advise, and then might be able so to deal with the advice as to leave the ground clear for his own proposal.

"Bridgeminster, something must yet be done before this man's execution—on which I need hardly say I am more than ever resolved."

"Amen !" said the pious duke, crossing his hands upon the table.

"He never could have played the part he did, but that he knew he had behind him great strength ; and although he may have miscalculated its immediate availability for his rebel plans, I entirely



believe the strength was there. I cannot rest till I know what this strength was—what noblemen of rank supported him—what gentlemen of local influence—what numbers he was expecting to bring into the field; but above all I want to know the joints in the harness of this grim spectre of armed rebellion. You understand me?"

"Oh yes, sire! you mean the special agents or leaders who were to work the whole organization."

"Exactly. Is it really hopeless to discover these men?" The king spoke in low tones; and the minister, in answering him, became still more inaudible to listeners near, if such there were.

"I know but of one course;" and the duke hesitated, and looked disturbed even at his own thought.

"Speak!" said the king. "I am no child to flinch because the prospect may be unpleasant."

"If he were sent to Scotland, which I think might not only be so managed as to suggest to the public that we were merely wishing to keep him out of the way of those foolish or criminal sympathisers, but also to make the public excitement calm down, as thinking this was but the first step towards ultimate mercy——"

"You mean——," said the king with a sinister look round, and then at the minister's face.

"I mean he might be so *questioned* there, as to be compelled to answer."

"You think so?" said the king absently.

"I did even venture, through other lips, to threaten him with this, without in any way making your majesty responsible, when I found him so obdurate to our demands that he should reveal his confederates."

"And then——"

"He laughed at us—laughed us defiance!"

"Indeed! we'll see to that!"

But then a new fit of silence and hesitation affected the king for perhaps a minute or more, and the duke, fearing he had gone too far, remarked—

"I am bound to tell your majesty the law on the subject is in a ticklish state; and there was great excitement when the last case occurred, Payne's, though the man was a far less important personage."

"I do not see the use of showing me remedies that I am forbidden to use!" ejaculated the king irritably.

"But if his execution quickly followed the question," suggested the minister below his breath "the facts *might* possibly be kept unknown."

Again the king started away on his walk up and down the chamber. But at last something of true

policy, perhaps even some nobler sentiment, caused him up to stop opposite the duke and say—

“No, Bridgeminster—it is too dangerous; and besides, the essence of my position in this country is its legal force and significance. I must not cut my own throat, and so save these worthy Jacobite gentlemen all further trouble. I forbid torture. But cannot the execution be hurried on?”

“Certainly!”

“And without the public knowing beforehand?”

“Yes, sire.”

“That would be well!”

“Sign this paper your majesty, and the thing is done.” The king signed without reading; then said sharply—

“And now I ask you to take care I hear not one word more from——”

“From any one—I stake my head on that! Not at least till I shall have sent your majesty news. You will not be leaving the palace, sire, just yet?”

“No;” said the king, and asked no further questions.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE LAST SUMMONS.

WHEN Christina returned to the Tower, she was in such a state of mind as is not often experienced by a human being. On the one hand she had secured the safety and freedom of her father and her lover (for these long days had brought her heart and George's into full knowledge of each other, and to a tacit compact of love)—events calculated to inspire an almost dangerous sense of joyous ecstasy ; while on the other, there was the destruction of her last hope for General Langton ; and the weight of her fearful mission to go back to his wife—and tell her of the failure of their joint contrivance to surprise the king into a pardon.

Could one have seen the soul of the poor girl apart from its material frame, it must have resembled that phase of the moon, when we see it—one half in the brightest light, while the other is in the very blackest darkness.

The generous-hearted girl wept passionately as

she thought to herself, ' I must tell her that I have succeeded in all that was necessarily most vital to me—and have only failed in all that makes life or death to her!'

But Lady Hermia had in the meantime confided these new hopes and schemes to her husband ; and he had so tenderly warned her of their certain failure, had so appealed to her to be true to herself, and her own noble character, and lastly had so spoken of his need for her—for her courage, and for her faith in his hour of trial, that she, while sure in her own breast he was only thinking of her, not of himself—began to revive—to feel with him the beauty of a noble life, and with him a supreme scorn for what the world might call an ignoble death.

Then, too, she could not but see that his last hour must affect with a sense of discord the previous lives of both, or become the crown to all. From that moment Hermia calmed herself, and valiantly took up her cross, in bidding her husband watch her while she received Christina.

And although there was just one wild rush of the heart towards the opening door, as if asking what it would do if a glad face should there present itself;—when she did see Christina, and knew all, she said to her a little faintly, but still with a smile—

"I have told my husband I should know how to bear your failure. Come then and help me to do so."

She turned—met her husband's anxious but brightening eyes—smiled on him, and again addressed Christina:—

"What of your father?"

"I have brought the order for his freedom and for George's."

"Thank God for that! a thousand—thousand times!" ejaculated Lady Hermia; and drawing Christina to her, she clasped her arms round her neck and wept on her bosom.

"Hermia, darling!" said General Langton, "you do not—cannot know how sweet are your words to me! how much I owe to this good man and his daughter! How criminal at times I have felt myself, in being the means of plunging him into so great a danger! This robs the scaffold of half its terrors; so my dear, dear wife, there is but the other half left for you to deal with."

Christina left them with the promise to return with her father and George, in the course of an hour or two.

And then Lady Hermia, no longer shutting out, as before, with almost mad impetuosity, all thoughts of the execution as a thing to be realized and prepared for, asked her husband a question which it

taxed all her strength to impart to him in seeming quietude."

"Have you any idea of the day or hour?"

"No!" said General Langton cheerfully. "But it is usual to give reasonable notice; and they are not likely in my case to give the world unnecessary reasons for charging them with harshness. Let us then enjoy such life as is vouchsafed to us. We love—we are united. Heaven itself can give me no greater joy than this!"

He took her hand and led her to the deep embrasure of the window. There they sat hand in hand, looking each from the other's face to the iron bars of the casement; and through them into a little court below, where they might occasionally see passers by. But wherever they looked, these two saw nothing but the faces of each other, while reckoning by the beats of their hearts, how long that privilege might last.

The silence was broken by the grating sound of bolts withdrawn, and of heavy doors opening.

"I expect the lieutenant to give me a call," said General Langton, with sudden divination of soul as to the possible meaning of this visit; and then, holding his wife's hand, he waited to see if it was him.

The lieutenant stood on the threshold. Lady Hermia could not distinguish his features through

the half obscurity of the place; and though she was nervously apprehensive, and for the moment in an agony of alarm, she quieted herself, remembering what her husband had said; and smiled in answer to his smile, as he told her he would be back again in a minute or two, and left her; without, however, her losing sight of him.

He went to the lieutenant, and stood so that his wife could see neither of their faces.

He had divined but too correctly the fearful truth. He was summoned to instant execution! A few faltering words from the lieutenant justified his dreadful surmise.

"Speak low, please! Is it impossible—quite impossible to give me a few hours for devotion."

"Absolutely impossible!" said the lieutenant—his voice husky with emotion.

"You do not wish to execute two persons where one will suffice?"

"Oh, my lord!" murmured the lieutenant.

"Pardon the violence of the expression; give me then a few minutes! That surely is in your power?"

"I will give you that—even if I lose my place. My orders are instant and secret death."

"Can you sound a light bell, or give a light tap in fifteen minutes from this time? And then in five minutes later I will call to you to open the door?"



“ I will tap—and wait.”

They shook hands—as if separating as usual after the morning call, and the General returned to his wife, whose fingers he found deadly cold, even while she still smiled upon him.

Commenting on some slight incident in the court outside, Langton did not venture to speak for perhaps two or three minutes, about the recent visitor ; and was relieved to find, that so far, his wife asked no questions. At last he said to her,

“ Hermia, my love, when you know all, you will thank God with me that He has been so merciful.”

But she was not to be deceived. Something in his voice, or manner, or look, revealed to her part of the truth. The lieutenant had brought news as to the day. Well, certainty was better than suspense. She would not fail him. She was prepared for the worst.

“ When is it ? ” she asked ; and he knew then she had read his doom in his eyes, though she could not know or guess as to its suddenness. Waiting her answer, she gazed persistently on those eyes, and saw how bright and courageous they were. “ When is it ? When ? Oh, trust me love, I will not shame my hero-husband. No, no, no ! ”

“ Hear first what I have escaped from, my Hermia, and then you will surely be brave to hear the rest. You know how I have been persecuted to give the

names of all those concerned with me in the insurrection scheme ? ”

“ Yes, yes ! ” she responded hurriedly. “ But when is it ? When ? Is it near ? Is it near ? ”

Her hands sank trembling on his shoulders ; her eyes devoured the truth from his eyes. He dared not let them tell her anything in contradiction of her words. So he let her take the awful truth, and know that the end must be indeed near, and continued his speech :—

“ But by what means do you think they hoped to wring those names from me ? Hermia, I was threatened with the torture ! ”

She fell upon his neck, and clutching him, panted and gazed round in almost abject terror.

“ They could not,” she gasped. “ O surely not in *England* ? Now ? And under *this* king.”

“ No ; not in England,” replied Langton. “ They lacked courage for that. But in *Scotland* it is still lawful, or they choose to think so. And I was to be sent there—to suffer as poor Neville Payne suffered—till those names, or some of them, were tortured from me. Sweet love, is not an early death precious mercy after *that* prospect ? ”

For some moments she clung panting to his neck. At last drawing away her arms with a shudder, she moaned again.

“ *When* is it ? When ? ”

Again his smile half dazzled her searching, agonized eyes ; and, drawing her white face to his bosom that he might escape those poor eyes, he answered her with wonderful firmness and sweetness.

"Hermia," he said, "if I had never lived before this moment, and was now born to spend these ten next blissful minutes with you, I could thank him for my creation as I do thank him now."

"Ten minutes!" The shriek rang out to the deaf stone walls ; the warm form fell and writhed upon the senseless stone floor, as so many shrieks had rung out, and so many forms had writhed in that same cell in days gone by. The unexpectedness of the stroke had ruined all.

General Langton was much agitated by the passionate grief to which her despair had changed.

She cried out wildly against those of whom she had so vainly sought help.

"Let me die, first ! first !" she pleaded, pushing off his hands. "Let my heart break before the time expires ! I cannot meet it. Oh, father ! Cruel, cruel ! Oh, false friends ! False, miserable, wicked, world !"

"Hermia," said her husband bending over her. "Hermia, sweet love. Shall death have *all* the victory ? I thought *our* love might triumph. I have been telling myself so all day ; and what is death

to me with life made perfect to the last by love ? ”

“ Why have I not tried more ? ” she cried, breaking from him as he raised her to her feet. “ Have I been paralysed ? What has made me so helpless ? Let me out ! Let me cry aloud for mercy on the streets ! ”

“ Hermia, wife, shall our last hours here do dishonour to the noble memories of this place ? Think of the brave hearts that have parted here. Think of Lady Jane Grey, as sweet and loving as yourself. It was from here she saw her husband on his way to death.”

“ Oh, but she was happier than I ! She knew that she should soon follow him.”

“ Remember that other dear martyr who still lives — Lady Russell.”

“ I *do* remember her ! Oh cold and slow to help, like all the rest ! I was with her but yesterday, and she promised me to come and learn from you how best to help us. Oh cold, and slow, and cruel, like all this most heartless world ! ”

With infinite patience, as if he had no sorrow of his own, Langton hung over her sobbing, shuddering form, and spoke of his love for her with such tender eloquence, that he might have been urging his suit for the first time. The poor despairing heart let go its grief and quieted itself to listen.

Then comfort came, and at last joy, such joy as love feels at finding itself conqueror over the worst anguish the world can bring it—even death.

They talked of their marriage morning, and the scent of the hay in the Leigh meadows seemed to rise above the damp mustiness of the cell. The whole history of their love, its faith and strength appeared to them so perfect, even with the tragic end impending, that while they dwelt on it together, they smiled into each other's eyes, half forgetting why the tears were there.

While they sat thus, Langton wondering he had not heard the tap, the door was suddenly opened. In spite of himself, Langton turned white, as if death had already seized his heart, and Hermia sank crouching beside him, clutching his arm with cold damp fingers; both believing the moment had come.

It was not so; and for a brief space, as they gazed upon the new visitor, neither knew whether to feel most sorry or glad for what must be a brief reprieve. It was Lady Russell who came in, the widow of the patriotic victim of State policy, Lord Russell. She had, no doubt, come to fulfil her promise, and must of course be unconscious of the dreadful deed to be done within the next few minutes; and which rendered all further intercession idle.

When Langton looked upon the noble form and face of the lady who stood before him, and recognized her as one of the grandest of the vicarious martyrs of the prison in which he was to perish, the water rose to his eyes, and his knee bent.

"Who should complain," he said, "even of such a fate as mine, if it brings with it the honour of such a visit?"

"I too," said Hermia, in a voice her husband could scarcely believe was hers. "I too should thank Lady Russell for keeping her promise to me, though it is—too late!"

"Late as it is, all shall be done that I can do," replied the noble visitor, taking the seat to which Lord Langton led her.

She was now over sixty years of age, and the face bore little resemblance to that bright picture, brightest now among the all-dazzling beauties in old Hampton Court. That sunshine of life had vanished and the calm starlight had come.

She looked round the too well-remembered cell; and a ghost seemed to hover in it. Her beautiful hands trembled, her firm lips quivered. The next minute strength and peace returned, and all her pity was for the poor creatures whose anguish had rushed back on them the instant the spell of their solitude and love was broken.

Hermia was again as one distraught, to think that

every second thus uselessly spent, was taken from the little treasure of time that remained to her.

"Why do you come now?" she cried. "Your name is held in such reverence, and your sorrow—*your* prayers might have bought his life! I have heard them say the king could refuse you nothing. Oh, yes; I know why you come now—to teach me how to part from him, as you parted from your poor lost one. But oh, your noble fortitude—your resignation, did not save, but kill! And can *I*, knowing that, be resigned? No, never! I'll shriek for help until my voice is gone. His murderers will be here presently. I'll be pent in here no longer—let me out. Open this door!"

She had rushed to it and stood like a mad creature, beating violently upon it with her tender, delicate hands.

In vain Langton, who wondered more and more as to the meaning of the lieutenant's delay, tried tenderly to draw her from it. In vain Lady Russell with her most commanding tones and gestures, approached and spoke to her. Hermia was too desperate to heed them.

"No, no," she cried, shrinking from her. "I'll not be like you and leave him to his fate. Let me out! I'll know if there's mercy in this world to-night! I'll be no meek martyr Jane to stay here on

my knees until the butchers come. Help ! Let me out ! Help, help ! ”

“Hermia,” whispered Langton, “would you grieve me ? Would you add greatly to my trial ? Would you fail me at my utmost need ? ”

Something in his voice again acted like a spell upon her. She gazed at him as she leaned against the door, and let her hands fall listlessly. Her wild panic left her, and she fell into his arms.

“Besides, my child,” said Lady Russell ; “your help may lie *within*.”

Hermia scarcely heard her words, but Langton’s eyes searched the firm old face with intense, but strongly subdued eagerness. The old eyes gazed back at him with quiet strength, and—if the idea had not been too extravagant, Langton would have thought she almost smiled.

“I have promised my poor help, and shall give it to the last,” she said firmly, but said no more, while evidently watching Lady Hermia, and full of anxiety about her.

Langton smiled as he bowed his acknowledgment of this promise, which shut out to him the possibility of her being already in possession of the power to help, a thought that more than once had occurred to him. He smiled, but the smile was full of despair. Meantime his tender reproach had acted powerfully on Lady Hermia. She gazed at



him as she leaned against the door, then turning, she threw herself at Lady Russell's feet, sobbing—

“O sweet, noble saint, forgive me! Help me! Guide me!”

“You should remember, my child,” said Lady Russell, laying one hand on Hermia's head, and taking Langton's hand with the other. “That even should life have been spared to him, he would certainly have been banished from his country.”

Hermia raised her eyes to Langton's, and the long, tender, despairing gaze of wife and husband into the very souls of each other, told their visitor more eloquently than words could have told, what life would have been to these two in any corner of the world.

The thought of it, and then the stony silence that followed, proved too much for the gallant prisoner, who had endured even the prospect of death so bravely. He cast himself suddenly at their feet and his frame shook with silent sobs.

Retaining Hermia's hand firmly in her own, Lady Russell stooped, and two or three times struck Langton gently on his side.

She looked at Hermia as she did so, and with a wonderful smile asked—

“My child, does this remind thee of nothing?”

Hermia gazed at her bewildered. Then a sudden light came to her eyes.

"Ah," she cried, as her hands clasped Lady Russell's knees, while she murmured faintly into her ear in an almost breathless whisper—

"The angel of the Lord smote Peter on the side."

Low as was the whisper, it raised Langton's prostrate form to its knees, and brought his wildly searching eyes close to Lady Russell's face.

Tears rolled down her cheeks—her lips quivered and broke into a lovelier smile than lives on that bright picture in Hampton Court.

"Ay Peter," she said, "arise up quickly, gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals!"

She laughed with sweeter music than the laughter of her girlhood, as the strong young hands on each side grasped hers, and the passionate young eyes, burning with desire for life, fed on the meaning of her face.

"Providence guided me to change my purpose of coming first to you. I went to the king. I come from him now. I learned with horror, he had despatched orders for instant execution. My good people almost flew here with me. The lieutenant heard my message, received my credentials, and then told me what he had done. Yes, my children, that man's humanity in giving you those few minutes, has saved you both; has saved me from a new calamity—for I had a power the king could not

resist; and saved our dear country from a murder only less cruel than my husband's. You are banished—but you go together. I came in fearing lest my very mission should destroy this dear lady; you, my dear lord, saved her from that. I have no more to say.”

“Come,” she added, after a pause, seeing how they gazed on her in boundless wonder, gratitude, and reverence. “Come, cast thy garment about thee and follow me! We must hasten through the streets before the news can become known. Otherwise *your* departure, my friend, may hardly be as quiet as Peter's, for half London will be waiting to give you, and this dear lady, joy.”

THE END.







